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# Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of a Teacher Mentoring Program

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# Walden University

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Walden University  
2014

Abstract

Beginning Teachers' Perceptions of a Teacher Mentoring Program

by

Irish McCollum

EdS, Central Michigan University, 2010

MA, Georgia State University, 1988

BS, University of West Georgia, 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2014

## Abstract

The decline in teacher retention is a growing problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Beginning teacher turnover rates have grown by 50% over the past decade, with the national rate increasing to over 20%. Beginning teachers entering the profession are leaving within their first 3 years, with half leaving the profession in the first 5 years. To meet their growing needs, districts and states spend billions of dollars to recruit, hire, and try to retain new teachers. The purpose of this case study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program located in an urban school district.

Bandura's social cognitive theory, socio-cultural theory, and Knowles's adult learning theory were used to frame this investigation. The research questions examined the extent to which beginning teachers perceived their current mentoring program's strengths and weaknesses, the mentoring strategies used, and the improvements that could be made to the program. Interview data and transcripts from 10 beginning teachers were examined through coding that established common themes among teacher perceptions. The results revealed the importance of having a mentor and the need for more structure, more collaboration, and more support in the program. The findings from this study were used to create a 3-day workshop that includes the identified themes. Implications for positive social change include strengthening mentoring programs through professional development with more attention to structure, collaboration, and support to help transition beginning teachers into the teaching profession so that they remain.

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## Dedication

I chose to embark upon this doctoral journey on my own, but I did not complete it that way. This project study is dedicated to my husband, Larvester, my son, Juan, and my daughter, Kia, who inspire me each and every day. The completion of this endeavor was dependent upon their love and support, as well as the love and support of my late father, Paul McCollum, who instilled within me a deep appreciation for learning and the belief that all things are possible with faith and determination. This accomplishment is given meaning simply because I have family with whom I share it.

## Acknowledgments

My doctoral journey has been incredible. I have never pictured myself as being “finished” with school, and I wonder what I will do with myself now that this project study is finally complete. I knew that this doctorate degree and the project study would be a difficult task, and it is not one that I took on lightly, but it took on a life of its own and took longer than I planned. This endeavor has provided both a humbling and an exhilarating experience, and it has given new meaning to the word support. Many professors, family members, friends, and co-workers encouraged and supported me in reaching this incredible milestone. I want to thank all of you. Please know that I could not have done this without each one of you.

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Susan McClary, for her ongoing encouragement and support throughout this process. Thank you for making me feel like it could be done and helping me reach the finish line. I also would like to say thank you to my committee members, Dr. Kimberley Alkins and Dr. Bonita Wilcox, for their recommendations and assistance throughout this process. I am indebted to my committee for their invaluable insight and feedback.

I would like to thank my family. No one completes a project study and works full time without a family who sacrifices a great deal. I have grown so much the past four years with the love and guidance of my family. The successful completion of my doctoral studies and this project study could not have been accomplished without the love and support of my husband, Larvester, my two children, Kia and Juan, and my granddaughter, Kai. I would like to acknowledge and thank Larvester for his patience and understanding

when the doctoral process seemed to consume every ounce of my time and attention. I want to acknowledge and thank Kia for her expertise, inspiration, and continued belief in me. I want to acknowledge and thank Juan for encouraging me along the way. I want to acknowledge Kai for being my shining star that I draw inspiration from daily. Your love and support during my years as a graduate student mean more to me than you will ever know. You have been very patient and never appeared frustrated as I spent countless hours writing and researching instead of spending time with you. I love all of you.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my late father, Paul McCollum, whose work ethic I am forever grateful. You taught me to love and appreciate education. You were, indeed, my first mentor who taught me so many of life's valuable lessons, not the least of which is to love learning. I also learned from you that if you worked hard enough, you can accomplish anything. I love you and share this accomplishment with you. It is as much yours as it is mine.

Finally, I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to the successful completion of this project study. I would like to thank Deborah, Lora, and Rita, the group of educators whose love and support during my years as a graduate student mean more to me than they will ever know. Who could ask for better friends and colleagues? I love all of you. This achievement would not have been possible without the insightful feedback and continued support from the three of you over the past four years.



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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

Teacher retention is a growing problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Beginning teachers entering the profession are leaving within their first 3 years, with half leaving the profession in the first 5 years. “In an era of increased teacher accountability, new teachers are encountering unprecedented challenges” (Fry & Anderson, 2011, p. 13), and exploring these challenges has been necessary to schools and school districts seeking to retain new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Fry & Anderson, 2011). Many beginning teachers leave the teaching profession early because they do not have the necessary support and guidance to grow and develop as teachers. According to Goldrick, Osta, Barlin, and Burn (2012):

Beginning teachers enter our nation’s classrooms filled with passion and commitment to make a difference for their students. Too often, however, they find themselves embarking on a journey isolated from their colleagues and faced with difficult working conditions, a lack of materials and resources, and the most challenging classroom assignments. (para. 1)

Many beginning teachers feel ineffective and often isolated in their classrooms with little or no support (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). This isolation can be difficult for beginning teachers, who are often left to succeed or fail on their own (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Ingersoll, 2012). Therefore, beginning teachers need support to ease their transition into full-time teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Scherer, 2012). In an attempt to ameliorate beginning teachers’ feelings of isolation, mentoring programs were introduced

in the United States and in other countries during the 1980s (Clark & Byrnes, 2012) and have been used as a tool to help beginning teachers ease into their new roles as teachers (Cook, 2012). Despite state-mandated induction and mentoring programs (Clark, 2012), many beginning teachers continually face developing effective practice on their own and experience “a time of intense learning and often a time of intense loneliness” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 10).

Many beginning teachers have no guidance and are left on their own while being held accountable for all of their actions (Arends & Kilcher, 2010). Induction and mentoring programs have been used throughout the nation’s school districts to help beginning teachers ease into their new roles as educators. However, the quality of mentoring programs varies considerably (Berry, 2010; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Yendol-Hoppey, Jacobs, & Dana, 2009). Although there is some evidence that high-quality mentoring programs contribute to improved teaching (Ingersoll, 2012), only a small percentage of beginning teachers experience such teacher mentoring programs (Smith & Finch, 2010).

The purpose of this case study was to examine beginning teachers’ perceptions of their teacher mentoring program located in an urban school district in Southeast Georgia. In this study, data indicated if one school district’s mentoring program has had an effect on what beginning teachers say they need as support, their perceptions of the support they have received, and their development as beginning teachers as a result of that support, and the level of support that has influenced their instructional practices. Section 1

includes a discussion of the problem, definition of key terms, the significance of the study, guiding research questions, literature review, and implications.

### **Definition of the Problem**

Traditionally, teaching has been seen as a profession of isolation (Ingersoll, 2012). Once hired by a school district, teachers are placed in classrooms and left on their own as they struggle to survive the first years of teaching (Arends & Kilcher, 2010; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll, 2012). Kutsyruba (2012) described teachers' first year of teaching as a "make or break time" (p. 236) as they "end up in the most challenging and difficult classroom and school assignments" (Ingersoll, 2012, p. 47).

The challenges beginning teachers face and the complexity of teaching in schools are well documented in the literature (Hughes, 2012). Beginning teachers experience significant challenges as they attempt to adjust to the demands and unrealistic expectations of their new profession (Cook, 2012; Kutsyruba, 2012). Beginning teachers are often overwhelmed by being expected to teach and manage students, trying to handle unfamiliar practices and procedures, and learning district curriculum and standard expectations (Cook, 2012).

Beginning teachers enter the profession with confidence and the anticipation of teaching and making a difference in the lives of their students (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). However, beginning teachers often experience a sense of frustration and discouragement, resulting in feelings of stress, isolation, and failure during the first few years of teaching (Alexander & Alexander, 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Fry and Anderson (2011) pointed out that "the challenges early career teachers face as they adjust to a profession

are not uniform, and may even be further exacerbated by personal and professional isolation from new colleagues” (p. 1).

Beginning teachers are often presented with unique challenges. The challenges of beginning teachers usually start when they experience difficulty transferring theory and knowledge from college preparation programs into practical application within the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Preparation programs often fail to translate effectively into classrooms (Panesar, 2010) and beginning teachers find that there are many responsibilities that come with the job of being a teacher (Moir, 2009; Panesar, 2010). Ingersoll (2012) pointed out that schools must be places where “beginning teachers can learn to teach, survive, and succeed as teachers” (p. 47).

Beginning teachers learn most effectively within the context of their professional environments (Darling-Hammond, 2010). According to Scherer (2012), “teachers want to be in environments where they are going to be successful with students, where they are getting help to do that, where they have good colleagues, where they are working as a team” (p. 23). Therefore, beginning teachers must receive the necessary help to become acclimated to the particular settings in which they work (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Villani, 2009).

The problems and issues faced by many beginning teachers during their first year of teaching prompted this research study. Teachers recently graduated from university or college preparation programs in school districts across the nation are having difficulties in their first 3 years of their teaching assignments (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Beginning



teachers are often excited to have a teaching position, but later find that the demands of the profession are somewhat overwhelming (Alexander & Alexander, 2012).

In addition, beginning teachers experience many problems that can have a major impact on whether they continue in the teaching field (Steinke & Putnam, 2011). Major problems for beginning teachers, including classroom discipline, student motivation, student assessment, dealing with individual differences, and insufficient planning time, have been well documented in educational literature (Fry & Anderson, 2011; Villani, 2009). According to Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012), beginning teachers who are unable to meet these and other challenges experience a feeling of inadequacy often resulting in high levels of attrition.

About 30% of beginning teachers leave the teaching field within five years (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Darling-Hammond (2010) stated that retaining quality teachers should be “one of the most important agendas for our nation” (p. 17), and it is important that schools and school districts develop more effective policies to retain and support the learning of beginning teachers. Based on beginning teachers’ first-year experiences, they “often leave one school for another and some even abandon teaching altogether” (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, para. 3). Retention should be a concern if students are to be taught by qualified teachers (Ingersoll et al., 2012).

Each year many teachers enter and leave the teaching profession in the United States. Retention of quality teachers is one of the main concerns of policy-makers. There is a widespread recognition of high turnover rates in beginning teachers globally, with reported turnover of 25-30% within the first three years of employment (Fantilli &

McDougall, 2009). According to recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), of the 3,380,300 public school teachers who were teaching during the 2007-2008 school year, 8% left the profession and 7.6% moved to a different school. For beginning teachers, those who have 1 to 3 years of experiences, the turnover rate was even higher, with 9.1% leaving the profession and 13.7% moving to a different school (Waterman & He, 2011, p. 139).

Retaining quality teachers is a major concern in many school systems throughout the state in which the study was conducted. For example, the state of Georgia experienced a teacher shortage of qualified teachers 5 years ago. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) indicated that 25% of college graduates with a teaching degree never enter the profession, and 30% of beginning teachers leave the profession during their first two years of employment (Georgia Association of Educators, 2013). A teacher shortage in schools requires school districts across the nation to provide effective teacher mentor programs for support of beginning teachers (Steinke & Putnam, 2011). Teacher mentoring programs are implemented to promote the growth and development of beginning teachers that will lead to improvement with beginning teachers' decision to remain in the teaching profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

School districts in Georgia are required to implement teacher mentoring programs. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) reported specific strategies to use in a school district mentoring plan. The school district's mentoring plan must be approved by the GaDOE and, when completed, an assessment of the mentoring program must be provided. Examining beginning teachers' perceptions of the mentoring program is crucial

for providing data to the school district program's strengths and weaknesses (GaDOE, 2012).

In one school district, 17% of beginning teachers are leaving the teaching profession annually. Many teachers can relate to the difficulties of being in the profession and the demands placed on their first year of teaching. Specifically, teachers are leaving the profession within their first five years of teaching due to high levels of frustration (Georgia Association of Educators, 2013). New teachers are often overwhelmed at the beginning of the school year (Moir, 2009); new teachers often feel "frustrated, stressed, and disenchanted with the profession" (Alexander & Alexander, 2012, para. 2).

Teacher mentoring programs play a major role in the retention of teachers (Hughes, 2012; Scherer, 2012; Steinke & Putnam, 2011). However, teacher turnover rate has increased steadily over the past decade in spite of following guidelines of mentoring programs developed by the GaDOE. Guidelines are used to support schools in keeping quality teachers (Georgia State Board of Education, 2012). Although school districts use these guidelines to assist them in developing and implementing teacher mentoring programs, few researchers have focused on beginning teachers' perceptions of such mentoring programs.

Lack of information in this area creates a gap in research on how to make effective improvements in teacher mentoring programs to ensure that school districts are able to retain teachers and challenge them to grow. Understanding beginning teachers' perceptions of a mentoring program may help explain the challenges faced by many

beginning teachers and provide strategies for ensuring beginning teachers' successful transition to the classroom and school and then retention beyond the first few years.

There is a need to retain new teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to define what supports are needed that may influence beginning teachers to remain in teaching.

According to Hughes (2012) "teachers want to work in schools where they have greater autonomy, higher levels of administrative support, and clearly communicated expectations" (p. 247). Teachers who are well prepared remain in teaching at much higher rates than those who are not prepared (Scherer, 2012). Retaining teachers is important for staff relationships and quality instructional practices, which can positively influence learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Because of this growing problem, in 2004 the United States Department of Education noted that mentoring programs for beginning teachers have come to the forefront for school districts and states as they try to keep their teachers (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009).

There is a wealth of research regarding the importance of teacher induction and mentoring programs aimed at improving teacher support. As a result, the implementation of teacher induction and mentoring programs has steadily increased across the United States (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009) in an attempt to support beginning teachers. Cook (2012) conducted a study evaluating beginning teachers' satisfaction with teacher mentoring programs and suggestions for implementing such mentoring programs based on their experience. Ninety-five beginning teachers participated in this study. Of the beginning teachers surveyed, 62% of them were content with their experience, while 38% were unhappy with their experience.

There are 48 states offering induction programs. However, the implementation and structure of such programs vary significantly (Berry, 2010; Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009). Most school districts incorporate a one-size-fits-all approach to mentoring, offering the same support measures to teachers (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009). Given the unique set of challenges faced by beginning teachers, a one-size-fit-all approach to mentoring will not support beginning teachers and retain them in the teaching field (Villani, 2009).

Literature indicates that schools and school districts may not provide adequate support and resources for beginning teachers (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009). Kutsyruba (2012) stated that “teaching has long been seen as an occupation that ‘eats its young’ and in which the beginning of new teachers’ journey is similar to a ‘sink or swim,’ ‘trial/baptism by fire,’ or ‘boot camp’ experience” (pp. 236-237). Therefore, the kind of support beginning teachers receive often determines their success or failure, which eventually determines whether they choose to stay in the profession. Very often, mentoring has been poorly designed and ineffectively implemented (Boreen, Johnson, Niday, & Potts, 2009). Far too many beginning teachers participate in a mentoring program that provides little or no support during this critical stage of their teaching career.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The problem at one middle school in an urban school district is an ineffective teacher mentoring program. The school district employs more than 13,400 full- and part-time

employees with a student enrollment of more than 98,700 students. The school district has 137 schools and centers. There are 77 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 22 high schools, and 17 other learning facilities. On average, the school district employs 350 new teachers a year (GaDOE, 2012).

Anecdotal conversations from veteran and beginning teachers at this middle school provide evidence that there is an immense problem. Veteran teachers share their frustrations that beginning teachers are not following their advice because they are overwhelmed with unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, beginning teachers complain that veteran teachers are unable to provide enough time to successfully guide them in their quest for successful teaching. The lack of time of veteran teachers and the overwhelming expectations of beginning teachers are not providing a successful teacher mentoring program. Despite state-mandated induction and mentoring programs, many beginning teachers continually face developing effective practice on their own and experience “a time of intense learning and often a time of intense loneliness” (Feiman-Nemser, 2012, p. 10).

Mentoring is crucial to address the problems and issues faced by beginning teachers. Beginning teachers are often placed in the classroom with little or no support (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Limited access to the mentor because of inadequate time and overwhelming demands is a tremendous challenge for many beginning teachers. Many school districts continue to struggle to regularly schedule opportunities for collaboration, common planning time, and having a mentor in the same subject area (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The school district's teacher mentoring program provides beginning teachers with professional development throughout the year. The Department of Professional Learning offers a program of induction called PRIDE (Program of Induction for new [REDACTED] Educators). This program is designed with the goal of providing initial and sustained professional development and school-based Teacher Support Specialist (TSS) mentoring support for beginning teachers. It is important that new teachers make a smooth transition into the profession (Hudson, 2010; Kutsyuruba, 2012).

The problem is visible in my school where a large number of teachers are new to teaching. In many school districts there is a mandate that assures that every beginning teacher will have access to a mentor. But the question remains whether all beginning teachers participate in a teacher mentoring program that is effective, and despite the fact that it is the school district's intention to assign all beginning teachers a mentor, it is not known if this is really what transpires. Although there is a need for support for beginning teachers, my school is not structured and organized in a manner that facilitates beginning teacher support.

The problem of having an ineffective mentoring program is important because most beginning teachers encounter difficulties during their first 3 years of teaching. There are some teachers who become frustrated, overwhelmed, and stressed, leading some to leave the teaching profession. In addition, there are several factors that are likely to make the first three years of teaching difficult such as the responsibilities of teaching, instructional and classroom management challenges, difficult teaching assignments, and nonsupportive

school cultures (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It is often the types of support that beginning teachers receive that determine whether or not they remain in teaching.

Support for and assistance to beginning teachers are needed in order for teachers to develop and grow as professionals. The type and amount of support new teachers receive or perceive they have received and the effect this support has on their effectiveness in the classroom must be examined (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Gilles, Davis, & McGlamery, 2009; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Schools and school districts should address the concerns of beginning teachers by providing appropriate opportunities for professional growth because beginning teachers' career paths are dependent upon their initial experiences.

The purpose of this case study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of a teacher mentoring program, which may help explain why teachers are still in need of support and guidance despite the existence of their school district's teacher mentoring program. School districts require beginning teachers to participate in mentoring programs to become competent and effective. By having an effective teacher mentoring program, schools and school districts can address the challenges of beginning teachers and provide strategies to better prepare and support beginning teachers during their most crucial stages of their career.

### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

Literature on beginning teacher mentoring programs and teacher effectiveness is accessible but limited research exists on the effectiveness of mentoring programs from the perspectives of beginning teachers (Boyd et al., 2009). Researchers have examined



whether beginning teachers' instructional practices were supported by the mentoring they received from teacher mentoring programs (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Stock & Duncan, 2010). However, few researchers have examined beginning teachers' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of their mentoring program.

Many beginning teachers find their first 3 years of teaching very challenging and often feel they need support from mentors, administrators, and the school (Chesley & Jordan, 2012; Jones, 2012). Many school districts lack an understanding of how to best prepare beginning teachers to meet the challenges in the classroom (Boyd et al., 2009). Many school districts have a teacher mentoring program assigned to support beginning teachers during their first 3 years (Sterrett & Imig, 2011). However, effective teacher mentoring programs must be in place to support and retain beginning teachers (Kutsyruba, 2012). According to Sterrett and Imig (2011), the initial years of a teacher's career are "make or break years in terms of teacher retention" (p. 69).

Furthermore, teacher turnover rates for beginning teachers in Georgia represent a cost to public education beyond the expense of operating schools. Concerned about potentially losing more teachers because of the lack of support, isolation, and overwhelming load of first-year teaching responsibilities (Grossman & Davis, 2012), Georgia educators began combating this problem in recent decades by providing teacher mentoring programs (GaDOE, 2012). Research by Feiman-Nemser (2012) indicated that providing high levels of support for beginning teachers through mentoring programs can lead to higher rates of retention.

Although research supports the use of mentoring programs for retaining teachers and simplifying their transition into teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), there are still debates over the best way to prepare teachers to improve instructional practices (Boyd et al., 2009). As indicated by a number of studies (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), educators' commitment to teacher mentoring programs is critical; educators could either support and promote the retention of beginning teachers or undermine the success of mentoring programs and result in teacher attrition. Ingersoll's mentoring studies revealed real differences in longevity between beginning teachers who were mentored and those who were not mentored (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The GaDOE (2012) stated that it is "committed to having highly qualified teachers in every classroom" (p. 10). In light of this commitment, there is a lot to learn about how to best support beginning teachers (Boyd et al., 2009).

### **Definitions**

There are several terms used in the study that needed additional clarification. The definitions listed below were significant to understanding the research study and its implications.

*Beginning teacher:* A teacher who has been teaching in a school fewer than 3 years (GaDOE, 2012).

*Highly qualified:* In the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), Congress defined a highly qualified teacher as someone who has full state certification and solid content knowledge (GaDOE, 2012).

*Mentoring:* The collaboration between an experienced teacher and a beginning teacher to assist in a variety of aspects relating to the teaching profession (Roff, 2012).

*Perception:* The organization, identification, and interpretation of a sensation in order to form a mental representation (Schacter et al., 2011).

*Teacher induction program:* The instructional, professional, and personal support provided to beginning teachers, which may include mentoring, collaboration among beginning teachers and their colleagues, and professional development activities designed to ensure teacher effectiveness (GaDOE, 2011).

### **Significance**

There is a need for research on supporting the needs of beginning teachers. In particular, there is a need to know how mentoring programs can better address the needs of beginning teachers. The significance of examining beginning teachers' perceptions of a teacher mentoring program is reinforced by Grossman and Davis (2012). These researchers described how school districts have left beginning teachers to cope on their own. Yet, schools have expected beginning teachers to perform as well as experienced teachers. Scherer (2012) described Lortie's (1975) comparison of a beginning teacher to a shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe, alone and unlikely to survive. Ingersoll (2012) asserted that the work of teachers is done largely in isolation. The study's findings could provide insights as to the challenges faced by beginning teachers and the importance of supporting the needs of beginning teachers. Examining beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring program could benefit the entire school district, including school leaders, teachers, and students.

Hobson, Harris, Buckner-Manley, and Smith (2012) also supported further investigation into the challenges of beginning teachers, having called for mentoring programs to “help keep teachers in their schools after their first year of teaching” (p. 68). Educators must reflect upon the support structure of schools and create organizations where beginning teachers can develop and grow professionally.

Although mentoring programs have proven to be an effective tool for beginning teachers, many of these programs have failed to meet the needs of beginning teachers due to inadequate program design and implementation (Jones, 2012; Scherer, 2012). Ineffective mentoring programs have been the cause of many beginning teachers’ discontent. For example, 62% of beginning teachers in the public school system with 5 years or less teaching experience have reported that they were not prepared to respond to the pressures of teaching (Jones, 2012; Scherer, 2012).

This qualitative intrinsic case study is significant for several reasons. First, in this study I explored an area of teacher mentoring that has not been fully investigated from the perspectives of beginning teachers. Secondly, school administrators can use this study’s findings to address the challenges that beginning teachers face, which could lead to social change with improvements to the mentoring programs that could give beginning teachers effective support. The results from this study may also increase positive change by including strategies for ensuring beginning teachers’ successful transition to the classroom and school and then retention beyond the first few years.

Findings from this study may be used to help schools and school districts with knowing what supports are required in order to facilitate success for beginning teachers.

Effective mentoring programs are not only valuable resources for beginning teachers but are necessary to retain teachers as well. Teacher retention can save school districts monies that are needed for resources and professional development to support and guide beginning teachers.

### **Guiding/Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of a teacher mentoring program. What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The following research questions were used to gain insight into that topic:

1. What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program?
2. What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program?
3. What are beginning teachers' perceptions of how their mentoring program could be improved?

This study shows the challenges faced by beginning teachers and indicates beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program. I examined how beginning teachers' perceptions can be used to help identify more effective ways to support them and improve teacher mentoring programs. This information is important for the possible development of effective mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Specifically, the study may inform the school district of

what worked well, how the mentoring program may be more effective, and how changes will enlighten future beginning teachers.

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this project study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring program at one middle school in Georgia. The literature review consisted of examining three conceptual frameworks that are most relevant to the topic of study. These theories provided information related to understanding beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program. This section also includes a historical overview of mentoring, the purpose of mentoring, effective teacher mentoring programs, and current research on teacher mentoring programs.

For this study, I examined literature from several sources, including the online databases Dissertation Abstracts, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Thoreau-Multiple Database, Psychological Abstracts, SAGE's online database, and Google Scholar, as well as sources obtained through the Walden University Library. Peer-reviewed articles and studies were located by using keyword search in the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), EBSCO Publishing, Academic Search Premier, Sage, and ProQuest databases. These sources account for the major portion of this review. *Beginning teacher, mentoring program, teacher improvement, effectiveness, retention, teaching practice, mentoring, teacher induction program, and teacher mentors* were used as broad keywords. Priority was given to articles and studies ranging from 2009 through 2013; although, older, primary sources were cited for theoretical principles. In my search, I included published documents on teacher mentoring programs.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on theories surrounding effective mentoring programs leading to job retention. It is grounded in the conceptual framework of Bandura's social cognitive theory, socio-cultural theory, and Knowles's adult learning theory.

Mentoring programs have been well-documented in educational research (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Roff, 2012). Mentoring programs help beginning teachers deal with the everyday challenges of the classroom and school environment (Roff, 2012). A mentoring program increases a beginning teacher's learning and supports professional growth. To investigate how the existing literature contributes to the study, I discuss three theories. These theories show the way in which adults (beginning teachers) learn. These theories help in the investigation of how beginning teachers perceive their current teacher mentoring program.

According to Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory people learn by observing others in action. In social cognitive theory Bandura emphasized how people learn from others. The focus of this theory is observation. People learn from seeing other people in social settings and that learning involves a relationship between people and their environment. For example, when beginning teachers observe veteran teachers, beginning teachers will learn from their observations. Bandura believed that most human behavior is learned by observing and modeling. A key component of a mentoring program is that mentees and their mentors learn by observing and modeling.

Another theory associated with this study is the socio-cultural theory, where individuals (beginning teachers) learn from each other through interactions. Vygotsky

(1978) believed that the accumulation of knowledge was not an isolated experience. He explained that knowledge is not just transferred from one person to another, but rather is socially constructed through interactions with others. Thus, cooperative learning is the focus of this theory. Beginning teachers have the opportunity to engage in cooperative learning. In Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development he emphasized peer collaboration (mentee and mentor) and proposed that adults are motivated to learn when encouraged and supported. Beginning teachers are found to be more motivated to learn when they receive support from more experienced teachers who have experience and knowledge to share (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). In the zone of proximal development, a teacher and learner (mentor and beginning teacher) work together on various tasks that the learner could not otherwise perform alone.

In addition, Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning is a social process, aided by others who are more capable. His social constructivist perspective and the concept of the zone of proximal development can be used to describe the interactions between mentors and their mentee (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that social interactions transform learning experiences. New teachers acquire knowledge over time while working closely with their mentors (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). For example, new teachers are sometimes given the opportunity to observe colleagues and discuss best practices. Teacher development occurs while beginning teachers are actively contributing to the learning. Mentors collaborate to help beginning teachers plan, teach, and observe (Gilles et al., 2009).



The final theory that created a foundation for this study was Knowles's adult learning theory (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Adults (beginning teachers) must have a working knowledge of how they learn. Mentoring programs designed to improve instructional practices focus on andragogy, which is the method or practice of helping adults learn (Knowles et al., 2011). This adult theory makes a beginning teacher's experiences meaningful. Knowles et al. (2011) determined that adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating their learning. Adults are self-directed and autonomous and have accumulated experiences upon which they create new knowledge (Knowles et al., 2011).

Andragogy provides insight into the learning acquisition of adults. Andragogy uses problem-based and collaborative approaches to learning (Knowles et al., 2011). Teacher mentoring programs are grounded in adult learning theory. A mentee's experiences provide a basis for learning. It is important to understand what motivates adults (beginning teachers) to grow and learn. Knowles's views of the andragogical model are connected to teacher mentoring programs. The mentee and mentor are coming together to share experiences, knowledge, and strategies to improve student achievement.

Although each of the previously mentioned theories is described independently, they can be combined to develop, maintain, and sustain a successful teacher mentoring program. These theories provide theoretical understanding of beginning teachers' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program.

## Historical Overview of Mentoring

The concept of mentoring originated in Greek mythology. Greek mythology was the first record of any literature using the word *mentor*. In Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, the main character, Odysseus, was preparing to fight the Trojan War when he realized he would be leaving behind his infant son, Telemachus. Odysseus asked his good friend, Mentor, to watch over and guide his son while he was away (Green-Powell, 2012). Mentor acted as a counselor, coach, and advisor helping Telemachus grow into young adulthood. Mentor was responsible for the child's development. According to Green-Powell (2012), "the first mentor was an older, more experienced and trusted individual who took an active interest in developing a younger person in every facet of his/her life and career" (p. 100). This relationship came to define mentoring as a process where an older person helps to guide a younger person.

Although mentoring began as a process by a known and trusted person, it has evolved into a variety of programs where adults are recruited and trained to become mentors for those in need of assistance. While mentors are not totally accountable for their mentees, they do provide significant guidance, support, and learning that can lead to professional growth. Mentor is often used to describe people who help guide, teach, and coach their mentee (Villani, 2009). Today, the term *mentor* has been used within literature to define a person who is responsible for guiding and nurturing others early on in their profession. Mentors change their roles to fit the needs of their mentees (Dzickowski, 2013).

Defining the term *mentoring* has been a difficult task over the years for researchers. Information presented in the literature on the definition of mentoring and research pertaining to the study of mentoring reveals a variety of definitions for the term based on its purpose. During the late 1970s, Levinson was one of the first researchers to study mentoring. Levinson found mentoring as a means to provide career advancement and provided a definition of mentoring as that of a teacher and sponsor (Levinson, Darrow, Klien, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). Levinson et al. (1978) further believed that the main purpose of a mentor was to serve as a transitional figure for a mentee. In education, a mentor is one who provides support and guidance to help beginning teachers during the transition into their roles as educators (Hewitt, 2009; Hudson, 2010). The role of a mentor is to help acclimate the mentee to the climate of the organization and build upon the mentee's prior experience by offering support (Dziczkowski, 2013).

### **Purpose of Mentoring**

Many beginning teachers enter the field of education because they want to make a difference in the lives of children. However, beginning teachers are faced with a variety of challenges "as they seek to adjust to new professional expectations and a climate of uncertainty while simultaneously developing their own professional and personal identities" (Fry & Anderson, 2011, p. 13). The first year is usually the most difficult in a teacher's career (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Beginning teachers do not know what to expect, what the school expectations will be, or how to work with the student population they will have (Jones, 2012). They are expected to take on the same responsibilities as experienced teachers, often with little or no assistance during their first year of teaching.

Unfortunately, these responsibilities may lead to new teachers leaving the teaching profession (Hewitt, 2009).

The purpose of mentoring is described in many ways in the literature. Current research indicates that the two types of mentoring are natural mentoring and planned mentoring. Green-Powell (2012) stated that planned mentoring happens within a “structured environment or program” and “natural mentoring occurs through friendship and collegiality, teaching, coaching and counseling” (p. 101). Both types of mentoring are used to support beginning teachers. According to Carver and Feiman-Nemser (2009), mentoring is a major form of induction support. Mentoring beginning teachers is often mentioned as an effective strategy for improving beginning teachers’ skills and the likelihood that they will remain in teaching (Blank & Kershaw, 2009; Davey & Ham, 2010). Mentoring support is critical to beginning teachers’ development. According to Grossman and Davis (2012), “to best support [beginning] teachers, keep them in the profession, and improve their instructional effectiveness, schools need to make sure that the mentoring they provide is a good fit for each teacher’s individual background, needs, and school context” (p. 55). Mentoring support for beginning teachers is necessary in improving education.

Mentoring is a solution constantly mentioned through teacher retention research. According to Womack-Wynne et al. (2011) “the mentoring process, combined with an effective induction process, can provide a minimum of a year-long period of nurturing and support for those who need it most” (p. 3). To successfully prepare beginning teachers, mentoring has been used as a tool to help beginning teachers develop and hone

their skills (Hudson, 2010; Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009) and is often provided to beginning teachers at the beginning of their careers, pairing them with a more experienced teacher for ongoing assistance (Grossman & Davis, 2012).

Mentoring plays an important role in the development of beginning teachers (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009; Roff, 2012). Feiman-Nemser (2012) has found that mentoring is the most common induction practice in the United States and recommends a strong mentoring component to include careful selection, training, and support of mentor teachers.

Mentoring is seen as an effective method for supporting novice teachers (Stock & Duncan, 2010) and their instructional practices (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Teacher mentoring fosters “a relationship of ongoing support, collaboration, and the development of knowledge and skills that translate into improved teaching strategies” (Cook, 2012, p. 3). Stanulis and Floden (2009) conducted a study examining the impact of teacher mentoring aimed at improving teacher quality and found that mentoring impacts teaching practices of beginning teachers.

Having a mentor is a significant factor in the retention of teachers. Pogrud and Cowan (2013) found mentoring to be valuable for the retention of beginning teachers. They conducted a survey of 76 beginning teachers who had been assigned a mentor during the 2011-2012 academic year. They reported that the results of the survey demonstrated that the mentor program had a positive outcome for the beginning teachers. The majority of the teachers thought that their mentors had definitely contributed to the

quality of their teaching. Because of mentoring support and guidance, beginning teachers can focus on students' learning sooner (Brannon, Fiene, Burke, & Wehman, 2009).

Researchers reinforce the premise that the support of beginning teachers as dependent upon effective mentoring. Mentors can assist beginning teachers in making the difficult transition from student to teacher (Stock & Duncan, 2010). Even though many new teachers are receiving varying degrees of support from mentors, administrators, and the school district, teacher mentoring programs can increase longevity and satisfaction (Steinke & Putnam, 2011). The goal of new teacher mentoring programs is to use trained experienced teachers to assist new teachers with procedures and instructional strategies (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Chesley & Jordan, 2012). Beginning teacher mentoring programs place emphasis on providing collaboration and support while helping beginning teachers to become competent and comfortable in the classroom (Boyd et al., 2009).

Mentoring programs offer school districts a vehicle for helping beginning teachers deal with the many factors that contribute to the stressful and difficult nature of their first year. Beginning teachers need teacher mentoring programs in place to help them examine, reflect upon, and grow in the teaching profession. If new teachers emerge from the initial years feeling positive about their accomplishments, they are more likely to remain in the profession (Jones, 2012).

### **Effective Teacher Mentoring Programs**

Teacher retention is of critical concern in many school districts throughout the United States and in other countries. Effective mentoring programs have been viewed as one method of retaining teachers and these have become prevalent in recent years

(Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Ingersoll and Strong (2011) in their review of the literature found that teacher mentoring programs positively impact teacher retention. They also found that the most effective mentoring programs offer beginning teachers lots of support, provide beginning teachers mentors from the same field, and allow beginning teachers the opportunity to participate in group planning and collaborative activities.

Effective teacher mentoring programs can have a tremendous impact on the performance levels of beginning teachers. Mentors offer support through which the mentee is able to experience success. Clark and Byrnes (2012) conducted an evaluation of the perceptions of beginning teachers in regards to the mentoring support they received during their first year teaching. The findings indicated that beginning teachers who received both common planning time with their mentors and/or release time to observe other teachers rated the mentoring experiences they had as significantly more helpful as those beginning teachers who were not provided these mentoring supports.

Participating in a teacher mentoring program can lead to beginning teachers staying in the teaching profession (Steinke & Putnam, 2011). Teacher mentoring programs have been shown to positively affect the retention of beginning teachers (Grossman & Davis, 2012). High-quality teacher mentoring programs have a positive impact in terms of increased teacher effectiveness, commitment, higher satisfaction, improved classroom instruction, and early-career retention of beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As Ingersoll and Strong (2011) noted, there are several positive outcomes of effective teacher mentor programs which included helping teachers make the transition from preparation to practice, helping teachers become more effective

early on in their careers, helping reduce teacher attrition, and helping increase teacher job satisfaction.

Various researchers throughout the United States have linked mentoring programs to teacher success. Teacher mentoring programs can foster beginning teachers' confidence, enhance teaching practice, improve job satisfaction, and provide the support that beginning teachers need to remain in the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In assessing the evidence on effective teacher mentoring programs, Strong (2009) found that the more comprehensive the support given to beginning teachers, the "less likely teachers are to quit" (p. 102). The evidence on effective teacher mentoring programs is also reinforced in the findings of a study conducted by Richter et al. (2011). They conducted a study examining the extent to which the quality of mentoring and its frequency during the first years of teaching influence teachers' professional competence. Findings indicated that it is the quality of mentoring rather than its frequency that explains a successful career start.

Teacher mentoring programs can assist school district's challenges of retaining high quality teachers (Mullen, 2011). Teacher mentoring programs help beginning teachers in overcoming the challenges of getting acclimated to their first year on the job; therefore, leading to less teacher turnover. Several researchers have shown that beginning teachers without organized mentoring programs are often left on their own. Beginning teachers need specific skills for learning to teach (Hanson, 2010).

Researchers have also suggested that without consistency in mentoring standards, established guidelines for the selection of mentors, and training and instruction to help



mentors develop their role as support teachers, the quality of teacher mentoring programs may be negatively affected (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Chesley & Jordan, 2012).

Yendol-Hoppey et al. (2009) focused on the challenges of mentoring. They presented the findings of a 16-month study of mentoring in a select group of high-poverty urban schools in the northeastern United States. They examined how beginning teachers struggle to survive during their first year and identified dispositions for social justice as a main component of success in the work of beginning teachers and their mentors. Yendol-Hoppey et al. stated that “program developers must recognize that most policy mandates lack an understanding of the learning needs of beginning teachers, particularly in urban schools, and the resources required to create effective mentoring programs” (p. 41). As a result of their study, there is a need for adequate resources and trained mentors (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009).

Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka (2009) provided further insight about the challenges of mentoring. Mentoring programs for beginning teachers can do more harm than good (Grossman & Davis, 2012); however, effective mentoring programs can help beginning teachers survive their hectic beginnings and develop as confident and successful teachers (Jones, 2012; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Effective mentoring programs should encompass high-quality mentoring. When mentoring occurs between veteran teachers and new teachers, it is often perceived as highly effective and valued by both partners (Strong, 2009). Recent studies indicated that more than half of the states have some type of teacher mentoring program (Berry, 2010; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). However, requiring the mentoring alone does not guarantee that mentoring programs are effective.

According to Mullen (2011), an effective mentoring program reassures beginning teachers to continue in the teaching profession. Schools and school districts can improve retention of beginning teachers by being active in the support of beginning teachers. A beginning teacher's success may be improved by the school district providing a comprehensive, coherent professional development program (Roff, 2012).

### **Current Research on Teacher Mentoring Programs**

Research has shown that up to 50% of teachers leave the teaching profession within the first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll, 2012). Many researchers believe that effective mentoring programs can assist school districts in retaining teachers and improving teaching best practices (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Whereas the importance of mentoring to improve teacher practice has been debated in the literature, beginning teachers' perceptions of mentoring programs have received less attention (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2009). While there are known benefits of teacher mentoring programs, many beginning teachers do not receive these benefits.

The need for teacher mentor programs is well documented in the literature at every level (Grossman & Davis, 2012; Ingersoll, 2013). Mentoring programs are provided to beginning teachers worldwide (Hobson et al., 2009). Most of the literature on teacher mentor programs focuses on new teachers' needs and roles of the mentor (Davey & Ham, 2010). Research findings indicate that in the last couple of decades, teacher mentoring programs have become the main component of a teacher training program (Hanson, 2010; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) to help new teachers adjust to their new professional responsibilities and encourage them to remain in teaching (Chesley &

Jordan, 2012). Many school districts require new teachers to participate in teacher mentoring programs within their schools and not aware if teachers are really benefiting from these mentoring programs (Iancu-Haddad & Oplatka, 2009).

Beginning teachers are vulnerable in the first 3 years of their teaching career (Darling-Hammond, 2010), and teacher mentoring programs have been found to positively impact their career success (Grossman & Davis, 2012). Although mentoring alone is not enough to develop and retain beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2012), teacher mentoring programs play a crucial role in the success of beginning teachers. Not only do teacher mentoring programs create an environment that promotes personal and professional growth by sharing knowledge and skills (Grossman & Davis, 2012), but provides beginning teachers with an opportunity to learn from mentors, which is extremely valuable in teacher retention (Pogrud & Cowan, 2013).

Approximately 33 states mandate some form of mentoring support for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). However, there are only a few effective programs to support beginning teachers (Hudson, 2012). Previous research indicates that support for beginning teachers have a positive impact on teacher retention, instructional practices, and student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Teacher mentoring programs can provide beginning teachers with support that helps them survive classroom management challenges, curriculum and instructional issues, and feelings of isolation that contribute to attrition (Boyd et al., 2009).

High-quality induction programs support beginning teachers (Boyd et al., 2009; Gilles et al., 2009). For example, the Comprehensive Teacher Induction Consortium

(CTIC), a group of similar teacher induction programs, has used a highly successful model for over 15 years (Gilles et al., 2009). According to Gilles et al., teachers who completed these programs tend to stay in teaching longer and are more successful than those who did not participate in an induction program. Moir (2009) found that “induction programs accelerate the effectiveness of teachers, fast-tracking their progress to exemplary teachers with the ability to positively impact student achievement” (p. 15).

Research has indicated that supporting beginning teachers is important to improving both teaching quality and retention. Many researchers have pointed out that the existing literature tends to see mentoring programs as a resource for beginning teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Scherer, 2012). Previous researchers have established that beginning teachers who receive support have greater improvement in instruction than those without support (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Beginning teachers who participate in teacher mentoring programs have better classroom management, use best practices, and maintain a positive classroom environment (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Understanding the factors underlying retention will help assure quality of teaching in our educational systems. When districts implement mentoring programs, not only can they save money, they can have a positive effect on teachers and students (Hudson, 2010; Moir, 2009). School districts want quality teachers because they recognize the relationship between quality teaching and the quality of education. Because retaining teachers is a top priority for school districts, teacher mentoring programs are used to support and retain new teachers.

Mentoring programs have been the solution offered in many school systems throughout the nation, but lack of clear goals and purpose in many of these programs has hindered their effectiveness (Berry, 2010). New teacher mentoring programs can vary from a single orientation meeting at the beginning of a school year to a highly structured program involving multiple activities and frequent meetings over a period of several years (Stanulis & Floden, 2009). Beginning teacher mentoring programs vary according to the number of new teachers they serve; some include anyone new to a particular school, even those with previous teaching experience and others focus only on those who are new to teaching (Hudson, 2012). Teacher mentoring programs also vary according to their purpose. For example, some are primarily developmental and designed to nurture growth on the part of the new teacher; others are designed to eliminate those who are not qualified to teach (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Many schools in Georgia face the problem of teacher quality; as a result, many school districts have filled vacant positions with teachers who have had little or no classroom experience. Because teacher quality is connected to student learning (Berry, 2010), the need for effective teacher mentoring programs is documented by researchers as critical to the growth and development of teachers (The National Staff Development Council, 2009).

### **Implications**

The findings of this study may support research done by Ingersoll (2012), which shows that effective teacher mentoring programs adequately support beginning teachers. First, in this study I provide knowledge and insight that can assist school districts in

better preparing beginning teachers to enter the school year. The discussion points emerged from this study provided important answers for the research questions.

Secondly, this study shows current and relevant information pertaining to beginning teachers' perceptions of the school district's teacher mentoring program, with a particular focus on the perceived strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, this study's findings may be used to increase positive change by providing strategies for ensuring beginning teachers' successful transition to the classroom and school and then retention beyond the first few years.

The study's findings may provide information to assist schools and school districts in determining whether current teacher mentoring practices are effective in supporting beginning teachers' needs. Results from this project study can be used to assist administrators and educators in their attempt to support beginning teachers. The information gained from this study will be used to inform the school district of more effective ways to support its beginning teachers. Recommendations may include enhancing mentoring program development, providing adequate support to beginning teachers, and writing a paper to the superintendent on the challenges faced by beginning teachers. The study's findings may have the possibility of providing information to assist schools and school districts in determining whether current mentoring practices are effective in supporting beginning teachers' needs. Tentative projects that could develop from the findings of this study might include a beginning teacher's handbook or guide or a supplemental professional development course with the focus of addressing beginning teachers' unique needs.

### **Summary**

The first year of teaching is the most challenging for beginning teachers. Supporting beginning teachers through mentoring and induction programs has proven effective to address several of the challenges that beginning teachers face (Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Villani, 2009). In spite of increased mentoring and induction efforts over the past several decades, beginning teachers' challenges continue to exist in many schools throughout the nation. Therefore, it is important to address the challenges faced by beginning teachers through effective mentoring practices.

The existing research provides an understanding into current methods of supporting beginning teachers, mentoring, and effective teacher mentoring programs. There is a significant body of literature that indicates that teacher mentoring programs are effective. Beginning teacher mentoring programs help educators and administrators to understand the unique needs of beginning teachers. Teacher mentoring programs propose solutions to the challenges that beginning teachers face. According to Hudson (2012), "understanding how to support beginning teachers must include beginning teachers' views on how they experience support within their schools; these viewpoints may help to devise strategies for supporting them in their early careers" (p. 72). The gap between being highly qualified and having practical applicable knowledge is an area that teacher mentoring programs should address.

Through interviews, I immersed myself in the experiences of 10 beginning teachers to document their experiences. By hearing the voices of beginning teachers, schools and school districts can understand the challenges faced by these teachers and

discuss the best methods of support. Section 2 is a description of my research methodology. It details the methods that were used to gather data for this study, including the research design, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and findings. Section 3 is a detailed explanation of the project. Section 4 includes the conclusions, a discussion for recommendation from the current study, and implications for further research.



## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

Research is defined as a “systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process” (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). I selected a case study design to examine beginning teachers’ perceptions of a teacher mentoring program. Selection of this research design allowed me to obtain a deeper understanding of a teacher mentoring program and its effect on beginning teachers’ growth and development (Creswell, 2012).

In this study I sought to describe, explore, and understand the mentoring program from the viewpoints of 10 participants (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). The nature of the research problem determines whether the research should be qualitative or quantitative (Creswell, 2012). According to Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Thus, a qualitative approach was appropriate to fully explain the experiences of the participants and allow me to gather the data necessary to answer the research questions.

A quantitative research design could not be used because of its lack of in-depth discussions with participants, which could reveal a detailed understanding of how beginning teachers perceive their district’s teacher mentoring program. To effectively support beginning teachers, it is important to listen to their voices and observe their experiences. According to Creswell (2012), “qualitative research can lead to information that allows individuals to ‘learn’ about the phenomenon or to an understanding that

provides voice to individuals who may not be heard otherwise” (p. 206). A case study was used to explore the experiences of beginning teachers. I was able to understand the problem under study from the participants’ perspective, rather than my own.

Within qualitative research, there are five types of studies, namely (a) grounded theory, (b) phenomenology, (c) narrative analysis, (d) ethnography, and (e) case study. Grounded theory is used to create a theory about a particular situation being studied. In phenomenology, the focus is on the everyday life and actions of people. It seeks the meaning of people’s lived experiences around a particular phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011), and does not meet the goals of this study. This study was not an attempt to understand a lived experience or to develop a theory; rather it was an attempt to gather beginning teachers’ perceptions of a teacher mentoring program. Narrative analysis uses storytelling to relate meaning of individuals’ thoughts and behaviors (Merriam, 2009). A narrative design was not chosen as it is used to look at a story and what it reveals about a person and the world he or she came from. This study was not looking at a person and the world he or she came from. This design would have produced unnecessary information that was not relevant to the topic of study. Ethnographic study was also unacceptable as an approach because the perceptions of a mentoring program would not be conveyed appropriately through cultural or social groups (Creswell, 2012).

After reviewing the different types of qualitative approaches, it was evident that a case study was the best choice. A case study was selected to guide my research questions after ruling out other options. Through a case study, the researcher attempts to gain in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and meaning for individuals involved (Hancock &

Algozzine, 2011). In this case study, beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program were examined.

This section is focused on a qualitative case study. This section is organized into a description of the research design and approach, including a review of the literature on qualitative design. This section is also organized into a description and justification of the sample and setting, data collection methods, data analysis methods, and a discussion of the limitations.

### **Research Design and Approach**

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study to explore beginning teachers' perceptions of a teacher mentoring program. I determined if one school district's mentoring program has had an effect on what beginning teachers say they need as support, their perceptions of the support they have received, their development as beginning teachers as a result of that support, and the level of support that has influenced their instructional practices.

A case study is used to document the experiences of individuals within a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). It is also used to collect data from multiple sources and perspectives (Lodico et al., 2010). Therefore, the study utilized a case study research design using interviews. I examined the structure, development, interaction, and collective behavior of an organized group (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Through a case study approach, this study involved participants' experiences, perceptions, and feelings gathered through rich, thick descriptions obtained by interviews (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers collect

data by examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants (p. 175).

In this study, qualitative methods were utilized to facilitate an understanding of how beginning teachers perceive their experiences participating in a teacher mentoring program. The qualitative approach also served to provide a deeper understanding (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009) of the support activities that were most beneficial in the teacher mentoring program.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, holistic approach to what is being studied (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). Because it best explores the question of what and how, qualitative research was chosen as the methodology for this study. In this study, the qualitative method facilitated an understanding of how 10 beginning teachers perceive and interpret their experiences. Instead of studying large groups, qualitative researchers conduct a more in-depth study on a limited number of participants (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). This type of investigation cannot be accomplished through quantitative research methodology.

Because the research focus is on a school district's teacher mentoring program, a case study design offers the best research design because it involves the depth examination of a single case (Creswell, 2012). This case study provided a systematic method for collecting and analyzing data, as well as reporting results. Case studies "can be chosen based on their type, characteristics, or disciplinary orientation" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 35). I was interested in a group of beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring program; therefore, an intrinsic case study was used. An intrinsic case

study is used when a researcher is interested in a particular individual, group, event, or organization (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

The study site was a middle school located in an urban school district in Georgia. The middle school was selected for this study because of the availability of data from the participants. Researchers collect data at the site in which participants experience a problem under investigation (Creswell, 2009, Merriam, 2009). At the time of the study the school district employed more than 13,400 full and part-time employees with a student enrollment of more than 98,700 students. The school district has 137 schools and centers. There are 77 elementary schools, 19 middle schools, 22 high schools, and 17 other learning facilities. The demographic breakdown includes 69% African American, 12.7% Hispanic, 11% Caucasian, 5.5% Asian/Hawaiian, 1.5% Multiracial, and .2% Native American. In addition, 69.75% of students receive free and/or reduced lunch (GaDOE, 2012).

### **Participants**

My school district has a teacher induction program to address the problems normally associated with the first 3 years of teaching. It is designed to provide initial and sustained professional learning and school-based mentoring support for beginning teachers. Every school is targeted for the teacher mentoring program. The school district's professional learning department provides all mentoring activities for beginning teachers. Some of the activities include monthly group meetings, individual mentoring conferences, observing and providing feedback, and modeling effective instructional and

classroom management practices. The names of beginning teachers and mentors are kept on file in the school district's professional learning department.

The research sample for this study consisted of 10 beginning teachers from one middle school. I identified "participants whose knowledge and opinions may provide important insights regarding the research questions" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 44). The participants were teachers who are identified as beginning teachers with 1 to 3 years' experience who participated in the school district's teacher mentoring program. Purposeful sampling was used to choose the participants. Purposeful sampling is used when the selection of people and location of the study is planned (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research, researchers purposefully select key participants or sites that will best help them to understand the problem (Creswell, 2009).

A qualitative study often involves a small number of participants; therefore, it will not be generalizable to a larger population (Merriam, 2009). The beginning teachers were chosen because of their participation in the mentoring program; they could give their own perceptions and insight on the mentoring services that were provided. The number of subjects selected for the purposeful sample had to be enough to assure that multiple perceptions would be captured during data collection and that these perceptions would create rich data from which to draw conclusions (Lodico et al., 2010). The number of participants in a case study varies (Glesne, 2011), but the decision to include 10 participants in this study was enough because it reflects 77% of the population of beginning teachers in the school. As a result, the number of the participants afforded me the opportunity to investigate many perspectives.

Qualitative samples tend to be purposeful, rather than random (Creswell, 2009). According to Patton (2002), purposeful sampling would allow the researcher to collect rich information that answers the research questions. Selecting the sample depends upon the research problem at hand (Merriam, 2009). Because in this study I investigated the perceptions of beginning teachers, purposeful sampling was necessary to include beginning teachers in one middle school in an urban school district. Purposeful sampling occurs when individuals are selected who possess the characteristics or attributes of interest to the study (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) stressed the importance of selecting a sample from which “the most can be learned” (p. 12). In addition, purposeful sampling allows the researcher to determine the criteria required in choosing what person to interview (Glesne, 2011).

Criteria for selecting participants were established to guide the process (Merriam, 2009). Once all beginning teachers were identified, I elicited volunteers to participate in the study. After those beginning teachers who were willing to participate in the study were known, I randomly selected participants (Creswell, 2011; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), “in a case study, sample selection occurs first at the case level, followed by sample selection within the case” (p. 82). The sample consisted of 10 certified beginning teachers.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues arise in qualitative studies and the researcher should anticipate and deal with them (Creswell, 2009). I followed the procedures and ethical guidelines set forth by Walden University as a way to protect all participants and ensure accuracy in the

study. Every effort was made to ensure participants' rights were protected. As required by Walden University, consent was attained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), number 02-12-14-0245375, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) web-based training course was completed. Consent for this study was obtained from the school site administrator. A signed consent form was obtained from each of the participants (see Appendix A). The consent form contained the purpose of the study, procedures to be followed, potential benefits of the study, and assurances of confidentiality.

Permission to conduct research and interview beginning teachers was obtained from the school administrator. It was my responsibility to protect the participants, the research site, and the data collected within the study (Creswell, 2012, Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). I identified and gained access to interviewees (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

To establish trust and credibility, the informed consent form had the name of the researcher and the reason for the study clearly explained (see Appendix A). The consent form also included information on the voluntary nature of the project study and explained the participants' right to refuse participation in the study or to withdraw at any point throughout the study. In addition, I explained the participants' rights and discussed the strategy of using pseudonyms to maintain participant confidentiality. I assured participants that their confidentiality would be protected during and after the study. The anonymity of the individual was protected by using codes on the interview instead of participants' names.



I provided an accurate account of all information obtained. I was honest and truthful in reporting the findings. The results of the study were made available to all participants upon request. Each participant was required to sign an informed consent letter that explained the conditions of the voluntary participation, confidentiality, and contacts for questions about the research. The consent form also explained that the interviews would be audiotaped, transcribed, and kept in a secure location.

Interviews took place for approximately three weeks. They were held at the participants' middle school site at an agreed upon time and specific location within the building. Participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their names and pseudonyms were developed. I secured all transcriptions of interviews in a locked file cabinet. I explained the purpose of the study, the nature of the study, and the likely impact of the study on the participants.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection procedure used to address the research questions for this qualitative study was an oral interview with beginning teachers. According to Creswell (2009) and Merriam (2009), data collection in the form of interviews is considered a common approach in educational research. Merriam (2009) explained that “data are nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment” (p. 85). Merriam further stated that interviewing is probably the most common form of data collection. Therefore, participant interviews are considered one form of data. Qualitative researchers use “richly detailed description” (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 270) to help gain understanding of a phenomenon.

Upon IRB approval, I conducted this study over a 3-week time period. I obtained permission from the school district and administrator of the study site. Beginning teachers were given a letter of informed consent (see Appendix A) to complete. Following the receipt of informed consent letters, I met with each beginning teacher to schedule a time and place to conduct his or her oral interview. The beginning teachers were interviewed individually in an area of the school which protected us from being viewed during the process. Upon agreement of a time and place for the interviews to be conducted, an email confirming this information was sent to each participant. Each participant was given a copy of the interview protocol.

I collected data by interacting with selected participants. In qualitative research, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product” (Merriam, 2009, p. 19). The type of data I collected was open-ended interviews. The open-ended interviews allowed firsthand accounts of participants’ thoughts, ideas, and experiences (see Appendix B). Ten beginning teachers were interviewed. The purposes of the interviews were to elicit participants’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program, the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program, and how their mentoring program could be improved. Several questions were prepared to investigate beginning teachers’ perceptions of their teacher mentoring program (see Appendix B).

Interviews were arranged with teachers who agreed to be interviewed. I contacted all of the 13 beginning teachers in the school who participate in the district’s teacher

mentoring program. Only 10 teachers agreed to take part in the study. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour and were scheduled during planning time in a location convenient for the participant or after school in the school's media center conference room. At the end of the interview, I thanked them for participating in my study and asked them if they had any questions regarding the study.

Interviews were taped and participants were assigned codes to protect their identities. After each interview, tapes were transcribed verbatim. There was one interview per participant. Participants were interviewed in a private setting within the workplace (Creswell, 2012). Beginning teachers were asked questions that pertain to the support provided by their mentors and the strengths and weaknesses of their mentoring program. The interview process provided a deeper understanding of the perceptions of 10 beginning teachers on the effectiveness of the teacher mentoring program (see Appendix B).

The open-ended questions used in the interview were designed to allow interview participants to elaborate more fully on their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program, the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program, and how their mentoring program could be improved. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews allow flexibility whereas emerging ideas could be explored and could be closely followed during the interview process (Glesne, 2011).

During the interviews, I became acquainted with the participants, established rapport, explained the purpose of the study, and asked questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Merriam, 2009), which allowed beginning teachers to reflect on their experiences

in the mentoring program. Open-ended questions were used to encourage the participants to discuss their experiences in terms of the strengths and weaknesses they perceived in the mentoring program (Glesne, 2011). The interview questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program's strengths and weaknesses, the mentoring strategies used, and how the program could be improved.

### **Role of the Researcher**

According to Patton (2002) a researcher is a teacher, collaborator, facilitator, and a social change agent. I have been an educator for 32 years. I have worked in the middle school setting during my career, as a teacher and a teacher support specialist. At the time of this study, I served as an English language learner (ELL) teacher and the ELL Department Chair at the study's site. Currently, there are no beginning teachers in the ELL department. In previous years, I served as a mentor to many student teachers and beginning teachers. Therefore, I had to set aside personal feelings for the purpose of providing accurate and valid information. In an effort to report reliable and useful information to the school district and other educational entities, I remained objective throughout the study.

I chose this site because of familiarity and easy access. I had worked at the study site for 12 years. I was familiar with the building and had a good working relationship with the faculty and staff. In addition, I have a trusting relationship with beginning teachers via employment within the study's site. I had no influence on the beginning teachers at any given time. I chose to study the school district's teacher mentoring program because teachers often complained about their challenges and needs as first-year

teachers. An ineffective mentoring program is a problem at my school based on anecdotal conversations from veteran and beginning teachers. I chose this study to examine beginning teachers' perception of their mentoring program and to make recommendations, if any.

My role as a researcher was one of gathering data through interviews by using open-ended questions. My role as a researcher required me to have an open mind and really listen to the thoughts and opinions of the participants. I obtained permission from the building administrator to conduct the study at the site. I explained in a letter to the school administrator at the study's site that my intent was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of the school district's mentoring program. I also informed the school administrator that 10 beginning teachers would be interviewed and that the activities would not interrupt instructional time.

Access to participants occurred through meeting with the administrator in charge of the beginning teacher mentoring program at the study's site. I obtained the permission of expected participants and encouraged their participation by sending reminders through emails. I conducted interviews and analyzed and interpreted data and sent a report of findings to everyone involved. I made provisions to handle ethical issues that occurred during the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Many qualitative researchers use a generic approach to coding. The procedure I used was a generic style. Creswell (2009) stated "often we see qualitative data analysis reported in journal articles and books that is a generic form of analysis. In this approach,

the researcher collects qualitative data, analyzes it for themes or perspectives, and reports 4-5 themes” (p. 184). Thematic analysis was used after all interviews were transcribed and color coded for organization by theme (Creswell, 2012).

I began the data analysis after conducting the first interview and this was a continual process while I worked on data collection. Data were collected and analyzed to understand beginning teachers’ perceptions of their teacher mentoring program. Inductive and deductive analysis was used to identify patterns and themes from the data. Data analysis was conducted through coding and theming of data. I analyzed, examined, and constantly compared collected data and placed them into categories (Creswell, 2009).

Responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using qualitative, validated coding procedures as this ensures accuracy in reporting results, themes, and emerging patterns in data (Creswell, 2009). Responses offered by participants were also analyzed to identify whether any concerns were expressed more by some beginning teachers than others.

Data were then coded and categorized based upon beginning teachers’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program, the mentoring strategies used, and how their mentoring program could be improved. The codes were determined based on the data and served to summarize, synthesize, and sort the many comments made by the teacher participants during the interview and in the narrative responses. The coded data were analyzed by comparing the perceptions of the various interview participants. Beginning teachers’ responses were compared in the search for

similarities and differences. Coding responses into themes was also helpful for identifying common ideas expressed by the participants.

I coded open-ended responses by creating a list of all the responses to a particular question. Next, I read through the responses and identified themes that were emerging in the responses. These themes were the codes I used. I assigned a code to each response given to the research question. Every response fell into one of the code categories. I identified the number of participants whose responses reflected the same theme. As a result I was able to identify certain characteristics and similarities and differences in the participants' responses. Responses to the interview questions were reported in a narrative form.

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The following research questions were used to gain insight into that topic: (a) What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program? (b) What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program? (c) What are beginning teachers' perceptions of how their mentoring program could be improved?

The interview protocol consisted of questions that specifically addressed each research question. Data analysis was qualitative, which consisted of non-numeric data for codes, themes, and patterns found in interviews. I utilized the following steps outlined by Creswell (2009): organized and prepared the data for analysis, read through all the data, and began detailed analysis with a coding process. Data were organized using files on my computer. The files contained codes to help identify information.

Because data reporting can be time-consuming for researchers, it was necessary to summarize the results based on the frequency of responses and recurring themes. I recorded the frequency of the recurring themes among the participants. Words that represented an individual's thoughts were quoted for use as supportive evidence of these themes in the findings. Upon review of the themes per subcategory and research question, I found common themes that emerged from participant responses. Four distinct themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes were the importance of having a mentor, lack of structure, more collaboration, and insufficient support.

The rationale behind collecting and analyzing data was to build a theory or concept rather than prove a claim or hypothesis (Merriam, 2009). I was able to obtain an accurate and inside view to the teacher participants' perceptions of their mentoring program. When reporting the findings, I included dialogue that supported the major themes. I also used an accurate portrayal of teacher participants by examples of word choice.

To ensure accuracy of the findings, I implemented three strategies identified in literature (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). One strategy was that of triangulation of data. Triangulation of data is when the researcher uses multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the study's findings (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation involved comparing the perspectives of 10 beginning teachers who have different points of view. Using the process of triangulation, I was able to compare and contrast data, themes, and commonalities. I determined discrepant cases or information by noting differences in the interviews. Presenting discrepant information allows the



reader to see the beginning teachers' different perceptions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I reported discrepant information that contradicts the themes identified to ensure the reliability of the findings (Creswell, 2009).

Two other strategies that were used to ensure the validity of the findings were that of member checking and rich, thick description (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Member checking was used to review interpretations drawn from the data collected, and rich, thick descriptions were used to ensure trustworthiness of the descriptions reported (Creswell, 2009). During the study, the participants read and approved the findings. Transcripts were given to each participant to review for clarity and accuracy. Each participant read his/her transcript, offered clarification, and verified that his/her experiences were accurately represented in writing. Rich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability (Creswell, 2009). I gave a description of the participants and the setting of the study to allow the reader to make a decision as to whether the data and findings can be transferred because of common characteristics. Transferability was also established.

During the interview process of the 10 participants, a thorough description of the participants' perceptions of their mentoring program was shared. The data were then analyzed to determine what topics needed to be included in a workshop for beginning teachers, which constitutes the actual project. The data can also provide valuable information about the teacher mentoring program to assist administrators, teacher mentoring program leaders, and other decision-makers in making changes and offering meaningful and appropriate beginning teacher mentoring programs. The information will

offer a foundation for others interested in beginning teacher mentoring programs that may want to utilize these findings to improve their programs and as a basis for future research.

### **Findings**

The research findings for this study were based on beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program. I examined 10 beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program, the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program, and how their teacher mentoring program could be improved to gain insight into the topic of sufficient support.

#### **Perceptions of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Mentoring Program**

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? In this section I address the first research question: "What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program?" The information provided is based on participants' responses specifically to Interview Question 8, which asked about strengths and weaknesses of the program but additional information was drawn from responses to Questions 1-7, and 9, which asked beginning teachers' perceptions of what they need as support, perceptions of the support they have received from the mentoring program, perceptions of their development as a beginning teacher as a result of that support, and perceptions of the level of support that has influenced their instructional practices.

**Strengths.** During the interviews, nine out of 10 participants shared that being assigned a mentor was a great strength of the teacher mentoring program. Participant 1, 2, and 3 were provided a mentor who worked with them. They mentioned that having a

mentor was a good thing. Participants 1-6 stated that being assigned a mentor helped them, and knowing that a mentor was available gave them a sense of not being alone. Beginning teachers identified emotional support, physical support, and positive guidance as some of the strengths of having a mentor.

**Weaknesses.** Once the interviews were underway, it became apparent that while having a mentor was beneficial for the beginning teachers, the support received from the mentor and the mentoring program overall was limited and this was a weakness of the program. Beginning teachers communicated that the teacher mentoring program did not facilitate their professional development and growth. Participants 1-6 indicated that they received support from their mentors, but the lack of support from the teacher mentoring program contributed to their uneasiness in their professional competence. They did not feel that they had adequate support from their teacher mentoring program. Participant 10 stated that the district's teacher mentoring program should have oversight of what is happening at the building level. Participant 10 further stated that pairing up beginning teachers with mentors in the same subject area could enhance the mentoring program. The participants interviewed described their frustrations when the support they were expecting did not meet their needs such as lesson planning, teaching strategies, student assessments, and classroom discipline. Several participants described how they persevered when mentoring support was lacking, including, seeking alternative mentors, asking grade-level colleagues for help, and relying on prior student intern experiences. Beginning teachers appreciated the input and opportunity to work with others when support from the mentor was not available or offered.

All 10 participants reported that the teacher mentoring program was a work in progress (in need of improvement). Participants reported that limited participation, lack of organized and structured monthly group meetings at the district level, dissatisfaction in meeting beginning teachers' needs, lack of expertise in the area of mentoring, difficulty in matching beginning teachers to mentors, lack of training for mentors, and lack of time with mentors were weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program.

In addition, participants felt that they did not receive specific support to enhance their professional teaching practices because the assigned mentor was neither an experienced teacher nor an expertise in teaching the same content. Participant 4 mentioned, "I expected to have a mentor who was more experienced and would provide specific curricular support." Participants 7, 8, and 10 mentioned that they would have appreciated having a more experienced mentor teacher to guide and support them as well. Participant 7 reflected:

"I don't think a mentor should have less than five years of teaching. There's something to be said about having skills and to be knowledgeable about your job."

Comments to support the teachers' indication of lack of support included the following:

- I did not receive the needed instructional support
- My mentor was not familiar with what I was teaching in the classroom
- My mentor was assigned to me and did not really want to help me
- We never met for guidance and instructional support
- My mentor was unavailable
- Only assign mentors who are willing to be mentors

- Allow beginning teachers an opportunity to express what they need as instructional support
- It would have been more helpful if my mentor taught the same subject matter

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question, “What are beginning teachers’ perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program?” was used to gain insight into that topic.

### **Perceptions of Mentoring Strategies Used in the Program**

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? In this section I address the second research question: “What are beginning teachers’ perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program?” The information is based on participants’ responses specifically to Interview Question 7, which asked about specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that helped them as teachers and the mentoring strategies used that they felt did not add to their growth as teachers.

One of the interview questions posed was the specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that beginning teachers feel have helped them as teachers. Eight of the ten participants could not remember specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program. They only shared the strategies they learned from their colleagues. After I provided examples of mentoring strategies, the eight participants only discussed what they had learned from colleagues. There were only two participants who

commented on mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program.

Participant 2 mentioned that there are not any specific mentoring strategies that are used in the program that she felt helped her as a teacher. Participant 2 mentioned: “My mentor and I should take time to observe each other teach. We should share ideas on strategies used in the classroom. It would have been great to have pre and post-conference observations.”

Participant 6 cited the frequent contact through the use of monthly group meetings held by the school district was helpful. She explained “In our monthly group meetings, we share information related to procedures, guidelines or expectations of the school district. We also share information about teaching strategies.”

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question, “What are beginning teachers’ perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program?” was used to gain insight into that topic.

### **Perceptions of how the Mentoring Program Could be Improved**

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? In this section I address the third research question: “What are beginning teachers’ perceptions of how their mentoring program could be improved?” It was based on participants’ responses specifically to Interview Questions 9 and 10, which asked about some things that the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom and some things that are done poorly in district’s training of beginning teachers or that the district could improve upon. Participants 2, 5, 8, and 10

mentioned that the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom by implementing the program called Teacher Pride, which is a monthly group meeting for new teachers. Participant 10 stated that this program allows new teachers to share resources and strategies for dealing with issues that may arise in the classroom. On the other hand, Participants 3, 6, and 7 mentioned that the monthly meetings do not really address the problems beginning teachers face. Participant 6 stated that the district should do a better job in assisting beginning teachers with instructional strategies and classroom management.

Beginning teachers were also asked about the changes they would like to see in the teacher mentoring program and how may the mentoring program impact beginning teachers in the future. All 10 participants indicated that they would like to see changes in the teacher mentoring program. The suggestions that were provided by the participants are aligned with effective mentoring practices mentioned in the literature review.

Participant 7 reported one of the changes she would like to see in the program is more focus on classroom management. She felt that the program could offer some strategies on handling student behavior. Participant 6 stated that the mentoring program could provide beginning teachers with instructional strategies so they would have a better chance of being successful in the classroom. Other participants reported that the school district's mentoring program should consider the following: (a) mentor should have the same planning period as the mentee, (b) the mentor/mentee pairing should be compatible, (c) the mentor should be familiar with the mentee's content area, and (d) the personalities of both the mentor and mentee should be considered during the selection process. They

suggested that the teacher mentoring program could be improved if the mentoring activities are tailored to fit their specific needs. The teacher mentoring program could also be improved by removing the existing mentor's many responsibilities within the school. As one would expect, the suggestions are very closely associated with the challenges experienced by the beginning teachers.

Participants 6, 8, 9, and 10 stated that they would benefit from more release time in which to foster and develop networks among their colleagues. Participant 1 and 5 gave suggestions on how to make sure that all beginning teachers participated in the teacher mentoring program. Participant 1 stated:

“Do not force anyone to participate, but make it mandatory. Advertise it and make it something that beginning teachers will want to be a part of.”

Participant 5 shared: “It should be required that all beginning teachers participate in the district's monthly group meetings, and a calendar of mentoring activities should be made available before the beginning of the school year, not after the school year begins.”

Participants 2 and 3 commented on having specific guidelines about the minimum number of meetings and topics for the mentor/mentee.

Participant 2 suggested, “Meetings of mentors and mentees should be conducted during scheduled times within the school day and include some release from instructional time.”

Participant 3 shared: “Meetings should take place on a weekly schedule that the mentor and mentee set to meet the needs of their work together.”



Participant 4 added that the program needs to use strong veteran teachers who have been trained to mentor. The participant explained: “Mentors should be experienced in working with beginning teachers. At times, I felt that my mentor did not understand my needs and did not know how to help me.”

Participant 9 echoed that sentiment by stating, “Every beginning teacher should be assigned an experienced mentor who can assist them with classroom set-up and procedures.”

Participant 6 recommended that the mentor and mentee should have the same planning period. Participant 6 explained, “I am just not sure how you could mentor successfully without common planning time. If we had shared planning time, there would be more opportunities to collaborate and share ideas.”

Participant 7 felt that the mentor/mentee should be compatible. Participant 7 commented: “We should have similar personalities so that we can have something in common.”

Participant 5 contributed to this thought by considering the personality of the mentor and beginning teacher. Participant 5 added:

“Having similar personalities is a tremendous plus in the teaching profession. It is very frustrating to work with someone who does not have similar personalities.”

Participant 7 and 8 commented on making sure that the mentor and mentee were of the same grade level and subject area. They both mentioned that the mentor and mentee could plan together and help each other out more if they were of the same grade level and subject area.

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question, “What are beginning teachers’ perceptions of how their mentoring program could be improved?” was used to gain insight into that topic.

As each participant in this study had unique experiences as a beginning teacher, I did not find themes that collectively explained the data. Instead, I identified four major themes that underscore similarities and differences among these 10 beginning teachers in my study: the importance of having a mentor, lack of structure, more collaboration, and insufficient support.

### **What are the Themes?**

Further analysis of the data led to the identification of four common themes. The first theme identified the importance of having a mentor. The second theme dealt with the lack of structure of the mentoring program. The third theme focused on more collaboration needed in the mentoring program. The fourth theme dealt with the insufficient support in the mentoring program.

**Importance of having a mentor.** The first theme that emerged from the data was the importance of having a mentor. Three beginning teachers (Participants 1, 2, and 3) stated that having a mentor was very important. They stated that their mentors provided much needed support. They reported that their relationship with a mentor teacher to some degree increased their teaching ability, assisted them with understanding the responsibility of being a teacher, and reduced feelings of isolation and anxiety. They reported that the sharing of teaching methods and materials was important, but even more

important was their mentor teachers' abilities to help them reflect critically on their own teaching.

Two beginning teachers (Participants 2 and 3) stated that having a mentor available to give meaningful feedback and in-class observations were particularly useful. They were given the opportunity to practice evaluations in which they demonstrated a lesson and received feedback prior to an evaluation conducted by an administrator. Having a mentor increased their confidence levels. Regular contacts and meetings between mentors and mentees are scheduled throughout the school year.

While Participant 2 said she had no challenges with her mentor, she was experiencing a variety of challenges with teacher leaders observing her without having practice evaluations in which she could demonstrate a lesson and receive feedback prior to an administrative evaluation. She stated that simply assigning a mentor in the hope that it will decrease the chances that the beginning teacher will be successful does not help. Building rapport, scheduling of teacher observation times, and maintaining regular communication with mentors were challenges. It was further stated that beginning teachers were not matched with their mentors based on teaching responsibilities related to content and grade level.

**Lack of structure.** The lack of structure was the second theme that evolved from the data. Participants 1 - 6 perceived the access to an in-school mentor as a positive component of the teacher mentoring program that helped them. Participants talked about a sense of isolation they were feeling as a beginning teacher. They mentioned that being assigned a mentor gave them a sense of not being alone.

In addition to the benefits of the mentoring program, participants indicated the challenges of the program. Beginning teachers reported that their teacher mentoring program provided an orientation for mentors and mentees and then sent them into the schools with little or no ongoing support. The monthly meetings offered by the teacher mentoring program were irrelevant or simply not useful to them. Beginning teachers would have preferred to receive more hands-on strategies and tools and less theory work. Participant 6 echoed, “The monthly group meetings were not well organized and well supported.” The teacher mentoring program did not have ongoing systems of evaluations in place to assess the program’s progress and effectiveness. Beginning teachers stated that they need to be part of networks where all teachers share and grow together. They expressed a need to interact and collaborate with other beginning teachers.

**More collaboration.** The third theme was more collaboration. Participants suggested ways in which they felt the teacher mentoring program could be improved. The participants specified a need for meaningful professional development and suggested that a workshop or seminar could provide sufficient mentoring support. The majority of the participants felt that collaboration was needed and increasing the number of times their mentors were in the classroom would be beneficial. Participants 8 and 9 explained that being observed by their mentor before being observed by an administrator would have been less stressful. All participants reported that they could benefit from more relevant professional development. Participant 2 suggested that being introduced to more practical resources and materials in a workshop or seminar would be helpful.

**Insufficient support.** Insufficient support was the final theme. When analyzing the responses given by the participants, I concluded that the teacher mentoring program was not accomplishing its purpose. All of the participants shared the inconsistencies with the teacher mentoring program. Four out of 10 participants mentioned the lack of support through monthly group meetings by the school district, individual mentoring conferences, observing and providing feedback, modeling effective instructional and classroom management practices, and opportunities for beginning teachers to observe effective teachers. Although the participants valued the emotional support from their mentors, they received very little support that focused on instruction. To help teachers cope with the challenges of the first year, most mentors seem to focus on providing emotional support (Grossman & Davis, 2012).

The stated purpose of the school district's teacher mentoring program is to provide site-based mentoring and instructional support to beginning teachers. Beginning teachers interviewed for this study looked at the district's teacher mentoring program as something from which they gathered a little information that did not translate to the building level well. To improve their pedagogical knowledge and skills, beginning teachers expressed a strong need for support focused on the teaching and learning of content. All participants gave examples of the types of support they had received, the types of support they needed, and strategies that were used in the mentoring program.

Participant 1 noted that the teacher mentoring program did not fully support her instructional and classroom management practices. She believed that the support she had

received from the school district's teacher mentoring program had helped her as a beginning teacher but stated that the support was sporadic:

As a special education teacher what I am receiving now in terms of support is personal support from my principal, emotional support from my mentor, and professional support from my colleagues. I have very little support from the school district. I think we all should have a different level of support based on our needs as beginning teachers.

Participant 2 explained that the teacher mentoring program did provide instructional assistance. She described the district level support that had been available to her as a beginning teacher:

My mentor has helped me; she has given me anything that I have needed. My mentor and I meet on a weekly basis because we have the same planning period. She helps me with lesson planning, instructional strategies, discipline, and other aspects of teaching.

As Participant 3 reflected on the support that she had received from the school district:

I think the school district does a good job letting teachers know what is going on with making sure that beginning teachers attend required meetings, but it is very difficult to attend these meetings after school.

Participant 4 responded in a similar manner as she identified specific people who have supported her from within the school district:

The school district has kept us in the loop through information with people to go to for help. However, those people are not always available when you need them. My mentor is not always available when I need her. I only communicate with her via e-mails when I really need help.

Participant 5 and Participant 6 believed that the district's monthly meetings were helpful. They were given the opportunity to collaborate and share useful ideas and teaching strategies.

Participant 7 indicated that classroom management was her biggest concern: "While the monthly group meetings were helpful with discussing instructional strategies, they did not help with classroom management practices."

Participant 8 was not assigned a mentor who could support her in her subject area. She explained that she did not receive the instructional support she needed as a beginning teacher: "My mentor teacher was not very helpful. She is a science teacher and has no knowledge of what I teach. I am a foreign language teacher."

Participant 9 indicated that she was not assigned a mentor. In regards to instructional strategies, she never had a chance to conference with a mentor:

I had to learn many things on my own, from teachers on my team, or through resources outside of the school. My support network at school consisted of my team members. Unfortunately, I was never assigned a mentor who might have provided instructional guidance and feedback.

Participant 10 stated that the teacher mentoring program was not consistent with meeting the immediate needs of beginning teachers:

At this time in my career, supports I need include an administration that is responsive to discipline issues, an appropriate space to teach my classes or a smaller number of students that would allow me to use the space I am allotted, and a buddy teacher that teaches a subject matter close to my own in a situation similar to my own.

While not every participant expressed frustration with every aspect of the teacher mentoring program, there was a feeling of frustration expressed by a majority of the participants in not having adequate support by the school district's teacher mentoring program. Participation in a teacher mentoring program is a complicated experience that is unique for each beginning teacher. The need for mentoring beginning teachers may be even more critical for those participants with limited experiences with their mentors.

### **Summary of Findings**

As documented in this section, data from interviews were used to identify common patterns and themes. What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research questions were used to gain insight into that topic. The summary of the findings is grouped according to the research questions that guided the project study, ending with discussion of the themes.

#### **Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 asked, "What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions of what they need as support, the support they have received from the mentoring program, their development as a



beginning teacher as a result of that support, and the level of support that has influenced their instructional practices.

Participants' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program indicated that although being assigned a mentor is helpful, they have minimal support from their mentors and lack the instructional support necessary to become successful in the classroom. Findings indicated that participants lacked support from their teacher mentoring program. To improve beginning teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, they indicated the need of additional support focused on instructional and management skills. Beginning teachers bring a specific set of needs to their classrooms and long for supports such as model lesson plans, constructive feedback on instruction, and classroom management tips (Goodwin, 2012). Participants expressed a lack of support and a need for more support. What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question was used to gain insight into that topic.

## **Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 asked: "What are beginning teachers' perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions about specific mentoring strategies used in the mentoring program that helped them as teachers and those strategies used that they felt did not add to their growth as teachers.

Findings indicated that many participants could not identify specific mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program that helped them as teachers nor

contributed to their growth as teachers. Beginning teachers' perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in the mentoring program indicated this lack of support through the district's monthly group meetings and school-based mentoring. However, one participant indicated that the district's monthly group meetings helped her as a beginning teacher.

What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question was used to gain insight into that topic.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked: "What are beginning teachers' perceptions of how their mentoring program could be improved?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions about what the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom and what are some things done poorly in the district's training of beginning teachers or that the district could improve upon.

Findings indicated that beginning teachers' perceptions of how their teacher mentoring program could be improved were based on what they believed the district does well and what the district does poorly in training beginning teachers. Based on participants' suggestions as to how their teacher mentoring program could be improved, the district's teacher mentoring program lacked content and structure that are needed to support beginning teachers. What do teachers perceive as sufficient support in a beginning teacher mentoring program? The research question was used to gain insight into that topic.

## Themes

The importance of having a mentor, lack of structure, more collaboration, and insufficient support were identified as common themes in the study. The themes that emerged from the data showed that beginning teachers need support through mentoring. There are gaps in the mentoring process that need to be addressed. It appeared that many of the frustrations cited by the participants could be corrected with more thoughtful and careful implementation of a teacher mentoring program.

The importance of having a mentor was the first theme identified by the beginning teachers. The participants in this study stressed the importance of having a mentor. The mentors had provided much needed support. Beginning teachers reported that their relationship with their mentors increased their teaching ability, assisted them with understanding the responsibility of being a teacher, and reduced feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Lack of structure was the second theme identified by the beginning teachers. The participants revealed that their teacher mentoring program lacked structure. It was pointed out by Participants 8 and 9 that the mentoring program has been poorly designed and ineffectively implemented at their school. Beginning teachers were provided an orientation for mentors and mentees and then placed into the schools with little or no ongoing support. The monthly meetings offered by the teacher mentoring program were not useful to them and not well organized.

Collaboration was the third theme identified by the beginning teachers. The participants felt that collaboration was needed and increasing the number of times their

mentors were in the classroom would be helpful. Beginning teachers believed that more collaboration with a mentor would have made them more confident and less stressful when being observed by an administrator.

Insufficient support was another theme identified by the beginning teachers. The findings were consistent with that of Yendol-Hoppey et al. (2009) that suggested that schools are not providing adequate support for beginning teachers. Far too many beginning teachers experience a disappointing relationship that provides little support during this crucial stage of their teaching career. They believed that their mentors lacked commitment. It was echoed by beginning teachers that they must be paired with trained mentors. In addition, beginning teachers relayed the need for additional mentoring support to address instructional and classroom management practices.

A professional development opportunity may be a viable addition for teacher mentoring programs that do not specifically focus on the individual needs of beginning teachers. Mentoring by itself is not enough to develop beginning teachers (Goodwin, 2012). In fact, the mere thought of having a mentor does not improve instructional and classroom management practices. Through this investigation into the experiences of 10 beginning teachers, it was evident that the district's teacher mentoring program was ineffective. The mentoring program could be improved by supporting beginning teachers through mentoring. The findings showed that beginning teachers lack support from their district's teacher mentoring program and rely on colleagues for support.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, limitations may be present. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. The research method employed for this study presented several limitations. First, the study may be limited to the honesty and willingness of participants in the interviews. Participants were asked to respond based on what they recall about their experiences in their teacher mentoring program. As in any situation that relies on the memory of the participants, there is a possibility of slightly distorted details of the data.

Another limitation is that mentors were not interviewed. This study only gathered data from interviews of beginning teachers. Additional interviews with the mentors can paint a clearer picture of the support or lack of instructional support given to beginning teachers. It would be of interest to make comparisons. Such knowledge might be useful for those intending to implement effective teacher mentoring programs. Furthermore, being aware of similarities and differences could inform how to improve the existing teacher mentoring program.

### **Conclusion**

The methodology for this study including the research questions, site of study, sample, instrumentation, data collection, researcher's role, and data analysis have been described in this section. The research questions focused on beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring program. Research procedures included the use of a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol of beginning teachers who had been involved in the school district's teacher mentoring program. Section 3 includes a detailed explanation

of the project. Section 4 includes the conclusions, a discussion for recommendation from the study, and implications for further research.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

The focus of this project study was to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program. Overall findings from the study showed that beginning teachers perceived that there was inadequate support from their teacher mentoring program. The findings validate Ingersoll and Strong's (2011) belief that beginning teachers are not receiving enough support to be successful in the classroom. In the interviews, beginning teachers indicated that their mentors are unable to provide enough time to successfully support and guide them in their quest for successful teaching, and they are often left to develop effective teaching practices on their own.

Beginning teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program, their perceptions of the mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program, and their perceptions of how the teacher mentoring program could be improved. Beginning teachers expressed the need for mentoring support and guidance in instructional and classroom management skills. A professional development workshop titled "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" would prepare beginning teachers and assist them in continuing to develop their knowledge and skills. The professional development opportunity may provide beginning teachers with access to mentors and an avenue of mentoring support. The professional development opportunity may also utilize the mentoring skills that beginning teachers require if they are to be successful.

Providing the skills and knowledge needed for beginning teachers to transition into teaching will potentially assist in beginning teachers' successful entry into the teaching profession. The decision accommodated the information obtained during the interviews with the beginning teachers and through the review of literature on what needed to be addressed with beginning teachers to maximize the chances of success. The results of the study highlight the need for the support of beginning teachers through mentoring. It also highlights the need for adult learning theories to be identified and utilized as the basis of planning and implementing the professional development workshop for beginning teachers. Hopefully this project can be the start of true transformation for the school and school district for supporting beginning teachers. The section provides a description of the plan for the project, the goal, review of literature, and justification for pursuing the project, content, and implications.

### **Description and Goals**

In this study, I interviewed 10 beginning teachers from the same school to determine their perceptions of their teacher mentoring program. Findings showed that beginning teachers perceived their mentoring program to be inadequate. Educators and administrators should create support structures and environments where beginning teachers can thrive and not just survive. The proposed professional development offers a different component to beginning teacher preparation from that which is already provided within the school district. The professional development workshop titled "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" is designed to address the needs of beginning teachers and how they can get the most from their mentoring program (see Appendix D).



The workshop is intended to supplement the school district's teacher mentoring program. The beginning teachers are provided with an opportunity to learn from others, experience new challenges, and grow in their career.

Through large and small group work, with an emphasis on experiential learning, beginning teachers will learn about themselves, their motivations for growth, about their expectations and needs, and how they can get the most out of participating in their mentoring program. Beginning teachers will discover the benefits of a mentoring program, learn the roles of mentors and mentees, practice being a mentee, develop a professional growth plan, develop a lesson plan and classroom management plan, and spend time with a mentor teacher in their subject area. Beginning teachers will also focus on practical skills and information that are not addressed by the school. These skills include how to organize a classroom, where to order supplies, what kind of assistance the district can provide, and where to find instructional resources. Breakout sessions will be geared toward beginning teachers' discipline. The breakout sessions will be facilitated by mentor teachers who have already shown interest in assuming roles in supporting the development of beginning teachers.

According to Ingersoll and Strong (2011), some of the factors positively impacting beginning teachers include having common planning time with other teachers in the same subject and having regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers. The "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" workshop is a way for beginning teachers to collaborate and pass on to other beginning teachers' ideas, instructional methods, and mentoring skills that they have developed or find important.

To facilitate active participation and interaction among group members, the workshop is limited to 18 participants. Mentor teachers are invited as guest facilitators so that participants can benefit from their educational expertise as well.

### **Project Rationale**

The project genre of a professional development workshop was chosen based on the findings from the interview data. The purpose for the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop will be to provide tools and strategies with which beginning teachers will be able to successfully create a foundation for their early years in the classroom. The mentoring workshop will be a great way to teach hands-on skills because it offers beginning teachers a chance to try out new mentoring, instructional, and classroom management strategies and fail in a safe environment. Failure is sometimes the best teacher. In addition, feedback from the facilitator and peers can help a beginning teacher understand what he or she can do to avoid failure in the classroom. The beginning teachers will need substantial information to support their start in a new classroom with new students. Participant 10 said, “A professional development workshop offered at the beginning of the school year would make a big difference in the success of teaching practices and in student learning.” Similar comments made by other beginning teachers interviewed support the perception that more professional development is needed. The need to address supporting beginning teachers through mentoring was based on the challenges beginning teachers face as they transition into the teaching profession.

There were two resources identified for the project: a workshop or a handbook. During the interviews, beginning teachers had indicated that a workshop would be the

best option for providing mentoring support. Designers of professional development should consider teachers' perspectives regarding effective professional development activities (Lustick, 2011). The "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" workshop will provide a way to create an intensive learning experience in a short amount of time. The workshop will provide beginning teachers with the opportunity to learn the roles of mentors and mentees and practice being a mentee, and learn pedagogical skills and how to receive constructive feedback. The workshop will also give beginning teachers contact with mentors and immediate answers to their questions, and allow beginning teachers to voice their concerns.

A handbook was also considered. However, this option does not appear to have the same value as a professional development workshop. A handbook does not present an interactive and collaborative approach. Beginning teachers will not be able to have opportunities for sharing and interaction. A handbook is not as flexible at meeting the individual needs of beginning teachers. In fact, a handbook may never be read by beginning teachers. Using experiential learning, a workshop is more effective. A professional development workshop employs a wide range of collaborative learning techniques such as group problem solving, case study analysis, role plays, brainstorming, and inquiry circles. The findings of this study support the notion that beginning teachers want to be actively involved with the information to be learned.

The review of literature in Section 1 confirmed the fact that mentoring support is and has been a problem for decades. Findings from this project study may provide an opportunity for more educators and administrators to become involved in developing

better ways in supporting beginning teachers. Given the evidence from the interviews and review of literature that beginning teachers need sufficient mentoring support, I decided that a professional development workshop is an appropriate genre for the project. The project of a workshop titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” became clear, as did the data that needed to be included in the workshop. What remained was how to accomplish this goal and make the workshop useful to beginning teachers.

## **Review of the Literature**

### Introduction

A workshop is the most “prevalent model” for delivering professional development (Gulamhussein, 2013, p. 2). Gulamhussein (2013) further stated that school districts should develop new approaches to teacher learning, approaches that create real changes in teacher practice and improve student achievement. According to Tohill (2009),

For professional development to be effective, it is essential that those providing this professional development understand not only teaching and the nature of teachers’ work, but also how teachers grow and develop both as individuals and as members of a professional team as a school’s staff group. (p. 601)

I have created a learning opportunity for beginning teachers to grow and develop in their practice so that they, in turn, can help students become successful.

A literature review was undertaken to address the many aspects of developing an effective professional development workshop. I examined what research shows about the approaches to professional development that changes teachers’ work and student

learning. In a recent study, researchers found that 90% of teachers reported participating in professional development, but most of them also reported that it was useless (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009, as cited in Gulamhussein, 2013). However, according to Gulamhussein (2013), it is not that teachers are not provided professional development, but that the professional development workshops being offered are ineffective at changing teachers' practice and student learning. This workshop will be a step in the right direction in getting beginning teachers ready for change.

The review of literature focused on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, which supports Knowles's (1984) adult learning theory. Effective professional development must develop pedagogical practice based on learning theory (Desimone, 2011). Three areas were covered in an attempt to validate the use of a "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" workshop for the project and to better understand the issues that need to be considered in designing the workshop to meet the needs of beginning teachers. I used experiential learning as the methodology to deliver the professional development workshop to beginning teachers and the five core features of effective professional development (Desimone, 2011). The literature review contained information on the principles of experiential learning, adults as learners, conducting an effective professional development workshop, and mentoring.

Peer-reviewed articles were chosen and the following databases were used: Thoreau, ERIC, Education Research Complete, SAGE publications, EBSCOHost, and ProQuest Central. The following Boolean phrases were used: *mentoring*, *experiential learning*, *adult learning*, *professional development*, *effective professional development*,

*professional development workshops*, and *Kolb*. A combination of the Boolean phrases and databases provided me with the information that enabled me to reach saturation for the theoretical frameworks and literature review.

### **The Principles of Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning is used as the methodology to deliver professional development workshops to teachers (Myers & Roberts, 2004). Experiential learning is based on the premise that experience is the basis for all learning (Kolb, 1984). Most modern experiential learning theory and practice has ties to original work published by Dewey in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Building off the work of Dewey and others, Kolb (1984) proposed a model of experiential learning that serves as the theory used to guide development of the project. Kolb presents a model with four distinct phases that encompass the experiential learning process.

An important fundamental of adult learning is that learning progresses from concrete examples to abstract ideas. One teaching method that can be employed by the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop presenters to capitalize on this fundamental is experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). A professional development workshop that is experiential in nature is critical to motivate beginning teachers to try effective teaching practices (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Beginning teachers can create knowledge from experiences rather than just from received instruction. Kolb (1984) posited that there are four learning modes that people may engage in any given experience. Kolb referred to them as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The cyclical process

begins with concrete experience for the learners (feeling the experience of the activity), which is followed by a period of reflective observation (watching what the issue or situation is generating). Next, the learners form generalizations about what they experienced in the abstract conceptualization phase (thinking about the issues) and then test their generalizations in the active experimentation phase (doing something about the issue or situation; Kolb, 1984). The cycle can begin again, building on what learners gained from previous experiences.

### **Adults as Learners**

To develop an effective professional development workshop, I would need to address the educational needs of adults. Two main theories guide teaching adults. The theories include constructivist learning theory and adult learning theory, or andragogy. Experiential learning is consistent with both theories. Although not a single theory attributable to one person, all constructivist theories are based on the premise that learners are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge (Goddu, 2012). Throughout the experiential learning cycle, learners are actively involved in every aspect of constructing their knowledge in a manner that is meaningful to them. If experiential learning is properly implemented, learners are definitely not passive recipients of knowledge.

Before I can develop an effective workshop, I need to know how adults learn so that I can apply some of those principles. Knowles (1984) outlined an adult learning theory, which Knowles called andragogy. Within this theory, Knowles (1984) presented key characteristics of adult learners and several principles for teaching adults. A major

principle of adult learning is that adults should be involved in planning and organizing their own instruction (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Experiential learning can achieve this through the reflective observations, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation phases (Chan, 2012). Another principle proposed by Knowles is that experiences are important in teaching adults. The concrete experience and active experimentation phases provide “here and now” experiences for learners (Chan, 2012). A third principle proposed by Knowles is that adults are more concerned in learning material that has immediate, direct relevance to them.

Experiential learning can accomplish this if the instructor or facilitator has taken the time to discover the characteristics and needs of the learners who will be participating in the workshop, which allows the presenter to make a direct connection between the new information and the participant’s needs. Professional development should not be taught in isolation; rather, presenters should work with participants in making connections between the new information being presented and their prior knowledge and experience (McLeskey, 2011). This principle is consistent with theories of teaching and learning for adults (andragogy; Knowles, 1984).

A final principle presented by Knowles (1984) is that adults prefer to learn in a problem-solving approach, rather than a content-based approach. Problem solving, cooperative learning, and experiential learning can be used to effectively deliver a professional development workshop to beginning teachers (Desimone, 2009; Sandlin, Wright, & Clark, 2011). Educators who have used the methods of problem solving, cooperative learning, and experiential learning are more successful in teaching the



content. These methods allow students to actively interact with the topic being studied (Desimone, 2009). Professional development activities should be designed to promote problem solving and application of knowledge (Sandlin et al., 2011). Problem-solving approaches present experiences that participants are required to work to solve. In contrast, a content-based approach focuses on the content, not the needs of the participants. By giving learners a concrete experience with the phenomenon being studied, experiential learning can easily be used to develop a problem-based learning environment (Chan, 2012). Given these principles of andragogy, experiential learning can be an effective methodology for teaching adults.

### **Conducting an Effective Professional Development Workshop**

A professional development workshop is a popular method of facilitating teacher development (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). It is designed to provide teachers with new skills and strategies that are used in classroom practice (McLeskey, 2011). Professional development activities should be thoughtfully planned and well-implemented in order to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills (Guskey, 2009). Effective professional development must first be focused on teacher needs, followed by determining the means with which to accomplish them (Desimone, 2009). A professional development workshop should be designed to meet the needs of learners.

Research indicates that professional development should tailor to the teachers' needs and experiences (White, 2014). Participants do not have the same level of expertise and experience. By assessing participant prior knowledge, the workshop designer and presenter can provide information that is of great value to all participants (Burkman,

2012). When this occurs, opportunities exist to change teachers, change instructional practice, and ultimately, improve student learning (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

In a descriptive study, Lustick (2011) surveyed 118 candidates for National Board certification in Adolescent and Young Adult Science from 42 states about their professional learning experiences. Results from this survey indicated that education leaders should design workshops to acknowledge individual needs, content learning, and specific goal-oriented outcomes.

Additionally, it is important for a designer of professional development to consider the characteristics of effective professional development that have been shown in numerous research studies to produce positive outcomes for improving teaching and learning (Blank, 2010, Desimone, 2011) that must be “adapted to the unique contextual characteristics of a particular school” (Guskey, 2009, p. 224). To enhance beginning teachers’ knowledge, skills, and classroom practice, I focused on five core features that comprise effective professional development cited by Desimone (2011): (a) content focus, (b) active learning, (c) coherence, (d) duration, and (e) collective participation.

**Content focus.** Many school districts offer professional development opportunities that are not content focused (Sanchez, 2012). Content is what teachers learn through professional development and is considered the most important feature of effective professional development (Desimone, 2009). Desimone (2011) stated that professional development activities should focus on subject matter content and how students learn that content (p. 69). Teachers should not be presented with generic content; they should be offered content that is specific to their discipline or grade-level

(Gulamhussein, 2013). In many instances, professional development workshops for teachers are designed to present new curriculum and teaching methods. To effectively present this new information, these workshops should focus on useful concepts and skills specific to the discipline or grade level (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Many school districts provide professional development workshops, assuming all teachers can benefit in the same way from the presentation of generic concepts such as assessment methods, classroom instruction, and classroom management. Although there may be a few common principles that apply to all teachers, presenters of professional development workshops should present new skills that are related to the content a teacher teaches and present useful concepts that are discipline-specific (Gulamhussein, 2013). Presenting concepts and skills without considering what content teachers teach greatly limits the usability of the information by the participants (Liljedahl, 2014).

Several studies have shown that professional development that addresses discipline-specific concepts and skills has been shown to improve teacher practice and student learning (Blank, de las Alas, & Smith, 2007; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Lieberman & Wood, 2001, as cited in Gulamhussein, 2013). Teachers report that their top priority for professional development is learning more about the content they teach, giving high marks to professional development that is content-specific (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, as cited in Gulamhussein, 2013). Therefore, a professional development workshop should be content-specific.

**Active learning.** Professional development promotes active learning for teachers (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). In a professional development workshop, the

method of delivery can create interest in a topic or can discourage participation (Burkman, 2012). Therefore, a professional development planner should consider how teaching practices are presented (Gulamhussein, 2013). Desimone (2011) has suggested a variety of ways to promote active learning, such as observing and receiving feedback, reviewing student work, or making presentations, and interacting with teachers, as opposed to passively sitting through lectures.

Researchers have confirmed that active, learner-centered instructional approaches are associated with improved learning in science. In a national study evaluating professional development workshops designed to help teachers move from teacher- to learner-centered science courses, researchers found that 89% of the teachers stated that they made changes in their courses that included active, learner-centered instruction (Ebert-May et al., 2011). These teachers were satisfied with the workshop, what they learned, and what they applied in the classroom. However, observational data showed that participation in professional development did not result in learner-centered teaching (Ebert-May et al., 2011).

A considerable body of research identifies active learning as a critical feature of effective professional development. For a professional development workshop to be effective, the presenter should teach the information using the same methods that the participants would use to present this material to their learners (Burkman, 2012). Just like the students must first understand a concept before applying it; similarly, teachers need an in-depth understanding of research or theory before they can attempt implementation in their classrooms (Sandlin et al., 2011). According to Tohill (2009), “teachers are

influenced in their learning by their personal approaches to thinking, their knowledge base, their own pattern of intelligences, their ways of learning, their social background and environment, as well as their willingness to engage actively in new learnings” (p. 595). A concept should engage teachers through varied approaches so they can participate actively in making sense of new learning (Gulamhussein, 2013). When teachers are given the opportunity to actively participate and make sense of the information being presented in a professional development workshop (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013), they see the benefit of using more active learning strategies in their own instruction (Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, & Fergus, 2010).

Traditional workshops are not only ineffective at changing teachers’ practice, but a poor way to convey theoretical concepts and research-based evidence (Tohill, 2009). Many professional development workshops involve teachers as passive listeners only (Gulamhussein, 2013). Moreover, effective professional development workshops which aim to make teachers aware of new skills and concepts have been shown to be more successful when they allow teachers to learn skills and concepts in varied, active ways (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013). Guskey and Yoon (2009) reviewed nine well-designed studies that showed a positive relationship between professional development and improvements in student learning involved workshops. These workshops, according to Guskey and Yoon, focused on “the implementation of research-based instructional practices, involved active-learning experiences for participants, and provided teachers with opportunities to adapt the practices to their unique classroom situations” (p. 496).

Research has shown that many schools continue to rely on teacher-centered professional development. In a study using a national sample to examine professional development practices in math and science instruction, Porter and colleagues (2000) found that professional development offered nationwide was not high, and that over 75% of teachers only participated in short term professional development that did not offer active learning opportunities and did not include collaboration (as cited in McLeskey, 2011). However, professional development should encourage experiential learning and use a variety of learning activities (Chan, 2012; Desimone, 2009).

In order to encourage experiential learning, a workshop planner must provide activities in which participants are actively involved (Hough, 2011). Professional development is based upon the premise that learning is best accomplished by doing and exploring and by participants building their own understanding (Chan, 2012). Desimone (2009) had similar thoughts and stated that teachers actively construct knowledge based on their past experience, the context of their classrooms, and the new skills and teaching strategies they are implementing.

Hanna et al. (2010) conducted a study in which they challenged the perception among adult educators that adult learners do not like active, engaged group work. They created a site-visit model that put their teachers and administrators into a learner role along with their adult students. The site-visit model resulted in more effective on-site professional development because teachers and administrators moved from being observers to being participants.

**Coherence.** Along with a focus on active learning, professional development activities should include coherence. What teachers learn in professional development should be consistent with their knowledge and beliefs, as well as with school, district, and state reforms and policies (Desimone, 2011). Blank (2010) argued that “designs and programs for professional development are often not coherent with the school curriculum and teacher assignments, and the learning is not integrated into overall school strategies for improvement” (p. 57).

In a study analyzing the relationship between quality measures of professional development and instructional content being taught, the researcher found two measures of the quality of professional development positively associated with greater alignment of instruction to standards: coherence with curriculum being taught by teachers and focus on content (Blank, 2010).

Desimone (2009) found that coherence is essential to effective teaching practice. In studies of large-scale samples of teachers, Desimone found that teachers who participate in professional development that is coherent are more likely to change their instruction and increase their knowledge and skills.

**Duration.** Ample time should be provided during and after activities to allow participants to conduct in-depth investigations, work collaboratively with others (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009), and reflect upon the experiences individually and with other participants (Zhao, 2013). According to Desimone (2011), “professional development activities should be spread over a semester and should include 20 hours or more of contact time” (p. 69). The duration of professional development must be

significant and ongoing to allow time for teachers to learn a new strategy and deal with the implementation problem. Professional development that is longer in duration has a greater impact on advancing teacher practice, and in turn, student learning (Gulamhussein, 2013).

Studies have shown that 1-day workshops are not effective at changing teachers' practice (Ball, 2002, as cited in Liljedahl, 2014). Professional development should be of sufficient duration to ensure that teachers gain in-depth knowledge of teaching practices (McLeskey, 2011). Providing teachers with professional development opportunities across a longer period of time is important. For example, Hartsell, Herron, Fang, and Rathod (2009) conducted a study investigating whether a four-week professional development workshop for math teachers helped improve their ability to integrate technology into instruction and teach math concepts. Results of the study indicated that the professional development workshop did improve their technology skills in using graphing calculators and different software programs. The professional development workshop also increased teachers' overall confidence in teaching different math topics.

In nine different experimental research studies of professional development, Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) found that professional development programs of greater duration were positively associated with teacher change and improvements in student learning. Likewise, Ucar (2012) found in a study with 145 participants of whom were 22 administrators, 86 mentors, and 37 mentees to understand how the process of teaching takes place. According to the findings, Ucar determined that teaching practice could not reach its goal because of the time and the



duration of the practice. Fourteen weeks of the teaching practice was stated as a problem in the process by the participants.

Liljedahl (2014) conducted a study in which workshops were designed around a variety of different topics, ranging in time from 1.5 hours to 6 hours with no follow-up sessions. The data indicated that workshops are ineffective means of creating teacher growth for teachers who are either resistant to change or are only willing to make small changes. The results also indicated that this was not true for teachers whose wants coming into the workshop were more open to change. Liljedahl stated that teachers come to workshops knowing their “wants and needs and use professional development opportunities as resources to satisfy those wants and needs” (p. 119). It was concluded that workshops can play a significant role in the professional learning of teachers. Much can be taken from the results of Liljedahl’s study. The most obvious is that teachers come to professional learning settings with a variety of wants and needs similar to the findings in Section 2.

**Collective participation.** Increasing the amount of time teachers spend in professional development is not enough. Time should be dedicated to allowing beginning teachers to work collaboratively and engage in meaningful learning (Sanchez, 2012). Desimone (2011) stated that groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school should participate in professional development activities together to build an interactive learning community (p. 69). Teachers should collectively participate in professional development with other professionals who share similar interests and knowledge (Tohill, 2009). This could include collaborative groups who meet and support teachers as they

implement a new strategy. According to McLeskey (2011), “professional development then becomes a collaborative endeavor involving groups of teachers and other professionals who can contribute to teacher learning and improved practice” (p. 28).

Studies have shown that effective professional development involves collaboration among teachers. Evidence of its importance was found in the participants’ responses to the interview questions in Section 2. Based on the data from the interviews, collaboration was not working among beginning teachers and their mentors. According to Hartsell et al. (2009), “teachers do learn from one another, and allowing teachers to interact within a professional setting that permits them to observe, communicate, and share ideas and concerns are important for change to occur” (p. 62).

Sanchez (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore teachers’ perspectives on the South Texas Writing Project Summer Institute and found that effective professional development opportunities (focus on content, active learning, and coherence) are significant in the development of excellent teachers. Sanchez concluded that the results indicated positive outcomes such as the teachers learn by doing, reading, reflecting, and collaborating with other teachers.

The five critical features (content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation) should be present in any professional development; however, these features alone do not indicate whether professional development is effective. Desimone (2011) suggested that a conceptual framework is needed to study the effectiveness of professional development. Desimone proposed a model of how

successful professional development leads to enhancing teachers' knowledge, skills, and classroom practice. Successful professional development follows these steps:

1. Teachers experience professional development.
2. The professional development increases teachers' knowledge and skills, changes their attitudes and beliefs, or both.
3. Teachers use their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction, their approach to pedagogy, or both.
4. The instructional changes that the teachers introduce to the classroom boost their student learning. (Desimone, 2011, p. 70)

According to Burkman (2012) professional development should be combined with mentoring programs to create a solid foundation of learning for beginning teachers. Burkman further stated that educators and administrators should consider professional development opportunities to supplement mentoring programs. They should provide opportunities for beginning teachers to continue learning in and from practice as they address the challenges of the teaching profession. Mentoring alone cannot support new teachers. Furthermore, instructional and classroom management alone encompass a wide variety of issues that are difficult to address solely by mentoring. Research indicates that a professional development workshop tailored to beginning teachers' immediate needs is appropriate (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2013; Guskey, 2009); however, a lot of workshops are a waste of time, especially if they do not offer sustained support (Guskey & Yoon, 2009).

## **Mentoring**

According to Kemmis, Heikkinen, Fransson, Aspfors, and Edwards-Groves (2014), people have different ideas about what mentoring means, how it should be done, and how people should relate to each other. In this study, mentoring is defined as one-to-one support of a beginning teacher (mentee) by a more experienced teacher (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the beginning teachers. Mentoring is often described as the development of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, which in turn provides the foundation for the growth of the mentee's skills (Ambrosetti, 2014). Mentoring is commonly practiced to assist beginning teachers to situate themselves within the schools and the demands of their teaching position (Kemmis et al, 2014).

Although beginning teachers require mentoring support to acclimate to their new positions and the responsibilities that come with it (Hudson, 2013), both the mentor and mentee discuss the journey together (Ambrosetti, 2014). According to Kemmis et al. (2014) mentoring as support is described as a process of professional support and guidance for a new teacher, in which a mentor assists the mentee in the development of their professional practice. According to Hudson (2013), "mentoring necessitates clear articulation of expectations and practices, as well as providing the mentee with various viewpoints about teaching" (p. 774). Beginning teachers need to be assisted to achieve and retain necessary competencies in their first years of teaching (Cuddapah & Clayton, 2011). Through effective mentoring support, beginning teachers could manage their own challenge and expand their knowledge base (Hudson, 2013).

Providing beginning teachers with the opportunity to participate in a mentoring workshop is important to their survival as beginning teachers. It is critical to engage and educate beginning teachers on the importance of good mentoring (Beane-Katner, 2014). Beginning teachers should engage with one another and with mentors in discussions about mentoring practices. Conversations among beginning teachers and mentors offer sources of support. In order for beginning teachers to maximize their mentoring opportunities, they will need to understand the concept of mentoring, as well as their role as a mentee (Beane-Katner, 2014).

Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) conducted a qualitative study that explored a cohort professional development experience that brought beginning teachers together every few weeks from across an urban school district. They examined how a cohort can be a valuable resource of beginning teacher support. One key insight resulting from the analysis included the importance of what professional development looks like when linked to mentoring practices.

In another qualitative study, Kardos and Johnson (2010) examined mentoring experiences across multiple school districts and states. They found that there is a critical need to identify specific aspects of mentoring that lead to better teacher practice. They identified and reported the effects of mentoring for enhancing teacher growth: knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, ability to effectively collaborate and build collegiality, and ability to reflect on one's own practice.

Tan (2013) examined the mentoring experience of beginning teachers and mentors in a school in Singapore. The findings suggested that beginning teachers enjoy

working with mentors who are sensitive to their needs and committed to helping them develop professionally. The findings also suggested that schools may want to give more attention to mentoring. Mentoring support is needed to assist beginning teachers with their personal needs, instructional needs, and professional needs. Through sharing and learning with mentors, support for beginning teachers can be done. Since beginning teachers are expected to be accountable for their work, opportunities for early professional development are necessary. When beginning teachers' learning is supported and facilitated by mentors, they can benefit in the classroom.

In another qualitative case study, Ligadu (2012) found that mentees valued professional learning and mentoring support from their teacher mentors. The researcher identified that mentees perceived mentoring roles, mentoring relationships, mutual planning and reflective practices, mentee observations of mentor teaching, peer mentoring, mentor modeling, and professional mentoring to be important contributors to successful mentoring. By providing support of beginning teachers through mentoring, mentors can identify at first hand mentees' strengths and weaknesses so that sufficient support and guidance can be provided accordingly.

### **Implementation, Potential Resources, and Existing Supports**

It will be my responsibility to implement the professional development workshop which will involve the following five steps: (a) get permission from my administrator (b) conduct needs assessments, (c) plan for the workshop, (d) conduct the workshop incorporating elements of effective professional development, and (e) evaluate results of the workshop. First, it is important to have the support of an administrator. Second, a key

to a successful workshop is to ensure that the mentoring content meets the needs of the participants. The proposed workshop content was determined by the data from the interviews with beginning teachers. Third, decisions about the proposed workshop mentoring topics were made based on recommendations of the beginning teachers. Once the decision was made, the next step was to plan the workshop. This is composed of several activities for which I will:

- Plan logistics for the workshop (after approval from the administrator) at the school
- Identify guest facilitators and mentors for breakout sessions
- Publicize the workshop
- Prepare materials and organize equipment
- Duplicate all materials for the workshop
- Obtain name tags for participants
- Prepare a sign-in sheet to verify attendance at the workshop
- Arrange for refreshments that will be available
- Develop an evaluation instrument to provide feedback to the presenter and to identify future needs

The fourth step will be to conduct the workshop incorporating research-based components of effective professional development: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation (Desimone, 2011). The final step will be that of evaluation. Evaluation is consistently recognized in the professional literature as both a critical component and a weak link in the delivery of professional development,

but it must not be overlooked (Blank, 2010). Both formal and informal methods of evaluation can be employed in determining the impact of the workshop. I will use a formal method to assess changes in instructional behavior, before and after the professional development workshop.

Potential barriers could include beginning teacher resistance who are not interested in attending the workshop. In addition to teacher resistance, the school may not be able to fund the teachers to attend the workshop. The timetable may be a potential barrier. The school does not have enough teacher workdays to accommodate a 3-day workshop for beginning teachers.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The implementation of this project could occur during the 2015-2016 school year. In order for the project to be implemented, several actions must take place.

1. I will hold a meeting with the administrator and assistant administrators of the school to present the project (May 2015).
2. Upon approval of the workshop, I will schedule the workshop (June 2015).
3. Contact beginning teachers, master teachers, and mentors via e-mail and inform them of the 1-day workshop. They will have 2 weeks to reply with their intentions to attend or not attend (June 2015).
4. Conduct a 3-day workshop (August 2015).

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others**

I will be the primary person responsible for the implementation and coordination of the project. I will be responsible for collaborating my project study's findings with a



framework of experiential learning and drawing on adult learning theory to design the project. The school will provide support in the ways of providing a location for the workshop. I will contact an outside expert who is familiar with facilitating successful professional development workshops to assist me in this project. I am very familiar with several professional development specialists in the district. I will also contact teacher mentors who are willing to assist me in the workshop. I will use the administrator to gain a list of beginning teachers and their contact information. I will also use the administrator to gain a list of mentor teachers and their contact information. There would be no need to solicit the help of anyone else.

### **Project Evaluation**

The goal of the teacher mentoring program studied was to help beginning teachers adjust to their teaching responsibilities; however, findings indicated that beginning teachers need additional support to enhance their teaching practices. The goal of this project titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” is to provide a professional development opportunity that is targeted to meet the needs of beginning teachers. Beginning teachers can gain additional support, guidance, skills and knowledge to help them transition into the start of the school year. The workshop will be successful if beginning teachers attend and make it a part of their ongoing professional development. Feedback will be gathered on the day of the workshop. Methods may include formative surveys, written response, and additional informal feedback gathering.

Additional feedback will be gathered after the first month of school. The follow-up survey will ask participants to evaluate the utility and quality of the materials and

information provided after they have had time to implement them in their classrooms. I will receive the feedback and use it to prepare for future workshops. I will adjust the mentoring content offered in order to continually improve the workshop provided. This information will also be reported to the school and all stakeholders involved at a scheduled meeting immediately following the workshop. I will present the information in a PowerPoint Presentation.

The workshop will provide a goal based evaluation that will provide the ability to determine if the goals of the professional development workshop have been met. Evaluation has been built into this workshop in two forms. The first measurement will be the number of beginning teachers who will attend the workshop. Another indication will be the contribution to the workshop by beginning teachers. Beginning teachers will be asked to complete a questionnaire on the effectiveness of the workshop. This would be an indication that the workshop was achieving its goals.

The goal based evaluation method of recording the number of beginning teachers attending the workshop was chosen because this type of evaluation provides data that will allow me to acquire grant monies that will support future professional development workshops. The second form of goal based evaluation, contribution to the workshop by beginning teachers, was identified because teacher contributions will provide me with data on the success of the workshop. To determine whether the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop is producing the desired results, questions and questionnaires will be prepared. I will use formative evaluations. I will ask for formative feedback from all participants. I will do this through a questionnaire (see Appendix E).

The questionnaire will be distributed at the workshop to make improvements on an ongoing basis. Informed decisions will be made as to the workshop content and length. I will look at the formative evaluations to determine if modifications to the professional development workshop need to be made.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

The literature reviewed and input from beginning teachers indicated that a “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop that addresses the immediate needs of beginning teachers was the best project to pursue. While the focus of this project was on a middle school in Southeast Georgia, research shows that teacher professional development is crucial. The outcomes of this study can also reach beyond this Southeast Georgia School. This “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop can serve as a model for other schools in the district, as well as the state and nation. In addition, the teachers in this school may be able to share learned teaching practices and skills with future beginning teachers entering the field of education. Achieving social change at a larger level is possible if other school districts implement effective teacher mentoring programs and professional development workshops. Therefore, this project could not only benefit and impact the selected school but also other schools in the nation.

### **Conclusion**

The project was chosen based on the needs of beginning teachers. A professional development workshop titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” was developed to be used as a vehicle for change. In this section I described the rationale for

choosing this method as the best tool for providing mentoring support for beginning teachers, the literature review was undertaken to better understand how theory was used to design, plan, and implement this project. I also discussed the implementation of the project and the means that will be used to determine if the professional development opportunity meets the goal of providing support of beginning teachers through mentoring.

The “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop was developed because there was a need to help and support beginning teachers. In addition to the benefits the beginning teachers would reap, there may also be a change and improvement in student learning. Using the perceptions of beginning teachers who are participating in the teacher mentoring program, I have been able to design a professional development workshop to share with my school.

In Section 4, my reflections and conclusions culminate the project’s strength and limitations. It includes an examination of what was learned about myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This section covers my reflections on the project study, the format chosen for a professional development workshop for beginning teachers, and the process of conducting an effective workshop. I begin with the strengths of the chosen format, a professional development workshop for beginning teachers. Then I address the limitations of the workshop and follow this discussion with what I have learned about research. Other areas discussed include what I learned about planning and designing, how I would approach the project differently if I were to plan it again, an analysis of what was learned about myself, and an overall reflection on the importance of the project and what was learned. I conclude this reflection with a discussion of the implications, applications, and directions for future research.

After the data were collected, coded, and analyzed, the findings revealed that beginning teachers are not receiving sufficient support through mentoring. Using the findings and current literature, a professional development workshop titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” was proposed for beginning teachers. Findings indicated that beginning teachers acknowledged a need for additional support; those interviewed felt the need for professional development with attention to instruction, classroom management, and mentoring. To increase the school and school district’s awareness of the needs of beginning teachers, a workshop was designed. The “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop will provide beginning teachers with information regarding mentoring, mentoring support, instructional support, and

classroom management skills (see Appendix C). In Section 4, I provide the project's strengths in addressing the problem, the project's limitations in addressing the problem, and what I have learned about myself during this process. Finally, in this section I discuss the potential impact that this project could have on social change and future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

There are many positive attributes that the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop offers that are not readily available through a handbook. A handbook cannot provide beginning teachers with the type of interaction that is needed to assist with meeting their needs. The “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop provides beginning teachers with an opportunity to expand their repertoire—skills, strategies, and knowledge in different situations. Beginning teachers can collaborate and discuss important teaching aspects related specifically to the challenges and requirements of the school. They can share ideas with other beginning teachers, develop lesson plans and classroom management plans with other beginning teachers, learn and practice mentoring skills, compare notes with other beginning teachers, receive immediate feedback, and reflect on their own teaching practices. Having immediate access to mentoring support and information has been pointed out by beginning teachers and the literature review as being a key element in mentoring.

Even the best planned project has limitations. There are a few limitations that have been pointed out from the literature reviewed and the beginning teachers interviewed. The first limitation will be the need to finance the workshop. The school budget is tight and a professional development workshop may not seem feasible to the

school administrator. Another limitation to be addressed is finding enough mentors within the building who can accommodate the varying degree of beginning teachers' needs.

My recommendations for the remediation of the limitations are to use the "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" workshop during teacher workdays, which would allow more teachers to participate. If teacher workdays are not an option, the "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring" workshop can be substituted for department or grade level meetings. Minimizing the financial burden can be addressed by using teachers within the school who have mentored beginning teachers with great success. Although the process may not be simple, my commitment will see this project on mentoring through to the end and can ultimately be successful.

### **Recommendations for Addressing the Project in a Different Way**

Information from the participants interviewed helped to guide me in the creation of a professional development workshop on mentoring. The workshop will help transition beginning teachers into the classroom. However, the project could have been addressed in other ways. One recommendation for addressing the project differently would be to create a handbook or guide with the information from the professional development workshop. This handbook or guide could be used on a consistent basis and referenced as needed. Another recommendation for addressing the project would be to create a website for beginning teachers and their mentors. The website would include special and continuing activities with topics directly related to the support of beginning teachers through mentoring. The website may include videos, which would provide a means for

beginning teachers to observe their mentors. Providing support in this capacity might also alleviate beginning teacher resistance to being observed themselves. Coaching groups, tutor groups, or collaborative problem-solving groups may also be included on the website.

### **Scholarship**

As a result of this project study, I have gained knowledge from readings, discussions, instructors, classmates, colleagues, collaboration, and research. Through collaboration and interaction with colleagues and classmates, I grew as an educator and student. I have gained a deep respect for the online learning culture and came to realize the benefit of the discussion posts. The activities and assignments required reflective thinking and enhanced my learning experience. I was often challenged to think critically about my role as an educator. My time management skills were enhanced as I sought to complete my course assignments in a timely manner. Each day my uncertainties regarding my scholarly writing skills diminished, and I became more confident that I would be able to successfully complete this project study.

Furthermore, scholarship was learned through coursework and feedback from my professors as well as my peers. My experience from the coursework taught me critical thinking skills, how to be a scholarly writer, and how to be a consumer of research. My experience from the feedback received from my professors and peers taught me how to appreciate different perspectives. Attending a residency created a sense of community and gave me the opportunity to collaborate with other educators and pass on ideas and research methods that I had developed or found important. Through my doctoral journey



of developing this project study, I also learned how to put things into perspective. I discovered how to collect information, as I improved my research skills and to select theories to support my research. Through this process I read and analyzed journal articles and books and developed research questions. I understand the importance of the protection of participants' rights such as issues of confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm. I now have a better understanding of how to conduct an interview. During data analysis I discovered how to recognize emerging themes and patterns, how to code them, and how to interpret my findings. Finally, I learned that planning a workshop means figuring out what I want to do to guide participants through the experience and what I hope to learn from it. I now understand how to bring about change. I learned how to find offer a solution that will promote positive social change by responding to a local problem.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

As I planned for and designed my professional development workshop, an awareness and understanding of the nature and characteristics of my participants were crucial. With this understanding, I was more sensitive to their needs and was able to tailor the professional development workshop according to what was most effective for them. This could maximize their learning experience. By planning this workshop, I was able not only to describe methods and techniques but also to provide frameworks for critically examining the workshop to determine how well I respected the needs of adult learners (beginning teachers).

I have seen the need to address the question of how well I actually planned the workshop. A workshop must produce results, and I must be able to provide evidence of those results. It is my responsibility as the planner of this workshop to make sure that the time and resources that are spent on this workshop are used to make the greatest impact possible. To measure this impact, I will target the attitudes of the participants about the workshop, measure the knowledge gained by the participants, measure the behavior changes by the participants, and measure the societal impact of the workshop. The effectiveness of this workshop will depend on my success in embedding a number of key adult learning principles in the delivery of the workshop. As the evaluation is reviewed, I can reflect on what is required to improve future professional development workshops to support beginning teachers.

### **Leadership and Change**

When I think of leadership and change, I think of three words: communication, listening, and proactive. Working on this project study required me to communicate, listen, and be proactive. Before I developed this project, I spent a lot of time communicating with and listening to the problem of beginning teachers. I recognized the need to use my talents and decision making efforts and those of others to respond to this problem. This problem required me to be proactive. A leader of change is proactive. In this project study, I have taken the initiative to recognize change and have explored appropriate ways to respond to the change. To accomplish this, I began with a vision, and I shared this vision by designing a professional development workshop for beginning teachers. This project required me to provide direction, implement a plan, and motivate

people. Not only that, I valued the contributions and efforts of 10 beginning teachers. I saw myself as a key player, and through collaboration with others, I was able create common ground that serves to facilitate action to the realization of my vision. I can truly say that with the contributions, talents, and efforts of others, I have made my vision a reality.

With leadership and change comes responsibility. I have been responsible for leading others to achieve a mission of supporting and guiding beginning teachers to be well prepared for a teaching career. This project has been accomplished through the use of my talents and decision making efforts to promote positive change. Supporting beginning teachers is a very strong passion of mine. I am always willing to talk about the needs of beginning teachers. Leadership enhances decision making and responsibility. I made the decision to design a professional development workshop on supporting beginning teachers through mentoring, and it is my responsibility to implement it. This project is just another step in this journey. I believe that the outcome of this project will be the ability for beginning teachers to have a place where they can voice their successes, frustrations, and become a source of strength for each other in a very isolated profession. The professional development workshop titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” is a vision of mine, and I am making it possible for others to be a part of my vision to make a positive change in the educational profession.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer**

Because I am developing and implementing a project to support beginning teachers through mentoring, which contributes positively to school improvement efforts, I

consider myself a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. As a scholar, I use my knowledge and desire to learn while actively engaging in such a project. When I started this doctoral program I believed that I was a true scholar. The readings, the research, the essays, the projects, the professors, and classmates added a lot of value to my practitioner-scholar development. This doctoral program has enabled me to grow, yet my journey has been long and not without a few obstacles along the way.

The knowledge, the skills, and the relationships that I have developed through my participation in this program have made me a stronger reader, researcher, and writer. My research on teacher mentoring has allowed me to establish my own voice in an area for which I have great passion. I can speak and write with greater authority and confidence because of the understanding of the theories which informed my own studies. I have learned how to apply appropriate and meaningful theory to my work as a practitioner-scholar. The results of my research have helped me to develop new insights into the complex process of teaching and mentoring. Learning to design and execute a qualitative study has helped me gain an appreciation for its strengths, as well as its weaknesses.

In addition, my coursework on critical thinking, leadership, learning theories, qualitative and quantitative research, program evaluation, and global experiences has broadened my perspective on a wide variety of issues. My mind is more open to different ways of perceiving the world. I have been able to use the knowledge and skills learned in my coursework to help my colleagues and my own students. I have been exposed to and participated in great discussions that have enhanced my doctoral experience. I was provided opportunities to engage in critical discussions and collaboration throughout my

course work at Walden. Not only that, I was well-informed of the various trends in education through educational resources.

I know that I am very dedicated to learning, and I know what to do with the knowledge I have. I tell my students that knowledge is nothing without knowing what to do with it. As I am completing this doctoral program, I believe I have the desire to learn more to make a difference in the world. I am considering other research projects in this field that I can contribute to the field of education and in the support of beginning teachers through mentoring. I realize that some of the research data that I will need to gather can come from the professional development workshop. I have a lot to learn, and I will use what I learn to continue to grow. I realize that even at my age there is still plenty of work for me to do in education and mentoring.

I have been teaching for 32 years and have always believed in the importance of thinking critically and creatively. I have had many opportunities to be a leader of many different projects. I actively participate as a school leader and manage numerous projects. I have been in leadership roles for most of my teaching career. However, this is the most important project that I have ever undertaken. As a project developer, I have created a workshop titled "Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring." This workshop is an indication of how I can take my knowledge and skills and put them to use for implementing social change. This project has the potential of providing additional support for beginning teachers and will be a meaningful tool for all beginning teachers.

Furthermore, I believe I am continually learning as the project unfolds. I have been able to gather resources from many different arenas to support me in the completion

of this goal. I know that I have the ability to bring the mentoring workshop to completion and the drive to accomplish this goal. My doctoral journey has provided me with the knowledge and skills to develop a project that can promote positive social change.

### **The Project's Potential Impact for Social Change**

This project is a professional development workshop titled “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” that provides instructional, classroom, and mentoring support to many beginning teachers who are receiving inadequate support through their school district’s teacher mentoring program. These beginning teachers are for the most part left to their own devices to figure out what their job is and how to do it. There are professional development workshops that enhance knowledge and skills but none of these provide a means of collaboration, mentoring support, and instructional and classroom management support. Beginning teachers need to interact with others who understand their situation and can answer their questions, share ideas, support them in difficult situations, and provide resources. If successful, the professional development workshop has the potential to decrease the isolation of beginning teachers, increase their confidence, and keep them in the profession.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

When I started this doctoral journey, I was not sure where it might lead me. With each course assignment, the course of my doctoral studies became clearer to me. As I communicated and listened to beginning teachers, the contribution that I wanted to make became very clear. However, the form of contribution still was not clear. It was with the

collaboration of beginning teachers that the decision was made to design a professional development workshop to support them through mentoring.

The “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop has the potential of reaching all beginning teachers. The applications that are meaningful for them can be achieved through the use of this workshop. Future research is also a very wide open arena. Research into teacher mentoring programs that are successful in supporting beginning teachers is needed. There is a need for research into ways that a professional development workshop would be more beneficial to support beginning teachers. Studies on how to better support beginning teachers offers a good direction for future scholars to engage in. This professional development workshop can be used by researchers to gain the information they need from the beginning teachers who are participating in the workshop and can offer them data with anonymity insured. These are only some of the ways that the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop can serve beginning teachers and provide a means to future research.

### **Conclusion**

Looking back at the research that has been done to get me to this point, I can say that I am a leader of change. I have learned to self-reflect and search for new knowledge. I will continue to grow and develop as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I realize that I am, as Gandhi said, the change I wish to see in the world. The study demonstrated what project would best meet the goal of providing beginning teachers with a means to successfully meet their individual needs. The effectiveness of this “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop will depend on my success as the

facilitator in embedding a number of key adult learning principles in the delivery of the workshop. The more the workshop was planned, the clearer it became that this was the best possible solution to make a difference in the educational arena.

I have engaged in an analysis of myself as a leader, project developer, scholar, and practitioner. I am very content with my growth and development in these areas. I still have a lot of room to grow but overall I have moved from knowing to doing. When I implement the workshop, beginning teachers will have the additional support they so desire and need. This professional development workshop has the potential of meeting the needs of beginning teachers and the potential to impact administrators, veteran teachers, and policymakers.



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## Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study to give your perceptions of the school district's teacher mentoring program. The researcher is inviting beginning teachers within the [REDACTED] County School District who have participated in the teacher mentoring program to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Irish McCollum, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a teacher, but this study is separate from that role.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine beginning teachers' perceptions of their teacher mentoring program in an urban middle school in Southeast Georgia. The study will explore beginning teachers' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher mentoring program, the mentoring strategies used in their teacher mentoring program, and how their teacher mentoring program could be improved.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to take part in a 45 - 60 minute oral interview. The interview will be audio recorded. There will be a follow-up meeting with you to review the interview transcripts to confirm accuracy of the information.

Here are some sample questions:

What are the challenges you face as a beginning teacher?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program?

Which mentoring strategies are effective in supporting beginning teachers?

What improvement would you like to see in the mentoring program?

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at your school will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

This study may provide insights as to the challenges faced by beginning teachers and the importance of supporting the needs of beginning teachers, which will lead to a strong start in their careers.

**Payment:**

There will be no payment for your participation in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **02-12-14-0245375** and it expires on **February 11, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

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## Appendix B: Interview Questions for Beginning Teachers

No. \_\_\_\_\_

Your answers will be helpful in the school and school district's decision to improve the program. Your answers will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation.

Position of person being interviewed:

Date of interview:

Place of interview:

Time interview began:

Time interview ended:

1. Briefly describe your participation in the mentoring program. What are the challenges you face as a beginning teacher?
2. What are your perceptions of what you need as support?
3. What are your perceptions of the support you have received from the mentoring program?
4. What are your perceptions of your development as a beginning teacher as a result of that support?
5. What are your perceptions of the level of support that has influenced your instructional practices?
6. How does the mentoring program facilitate your professional development and growth?
7. Identify specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that you feel has helped you as a teacher? Identify specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that you feel did not add to your growth as a teacher.

8. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program?
9. What are some things that the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom? What are some things that are done poorly in district's training of beginning teachers or that the district could improve upon?
10. What changes would you like to see in the Teacher Mentoring Program? How may the mentoring program impact beginning teachers in the future?

#### Follow-up Questions

1. What specifically did you learn from your mentor that helped your teaching practice?
2. Describe what you wish you could have learned from your mentor that you did not learn.
3. What do you perceive would be different if you did not have a mentor?
4. Describe whether you were able to have open and candid conversations with your mentor and why (or why not).
5. How often do you and your mentor meet?

## Appendix C: Sample Transcript

### Interview With Participant 10

- 1. Interviewer:** Briefly describe your participation in the mentoring program. What are the challenges you face as a beginning teacher?

**Participant:** I have had minimal experience with the teacher mentoring program. Last year was my first official year of teaching. I was assigned a mentor and we had two meetings after school. During this school year, I have not had many conversations with my mentor teacher. We met twice this year. We never met for guidance and instructional support. The district's mentoring program should have oversight of what is happening in the building. I feel as if my teacher education program thoroughly prepared me for life in the classroom. I have been with a co-teacher for the past two years, which has helped me deal with the challenges I have faced.

- 2. Interviewer:** What are your perceptions of what you need as support?

**Participant:** The only support I have needed on a consistent basis during my first years of teaching is from my immediate supervisor and principal. It is a great feeling to know that they will support you as long as you are doing what you are supposed to. Unfortunately, I have not experienced that. I have access to all the teaching resources I could ever need. The professional development program has been outstanding in terms of training. However, at this time in my career, supports I need include an administration that is responsive to discipline issues, an appropriate space to teach my classes or a smaller number of students that would

allow me to use the space I am allotted, and a buddy teacher that teaches a subject matter close to my own in a situation similar to my own.

- 3. Interviewer:** What are your perceptions of the support you have received from the mentoring program?

**Participant:** I have received minimal support from the teacher mentoring program thus far. My mentor teacher rarely checks in with me. We do not meet to discuss teaching strategies or classroom management issues.

- 4. Interviewer:** What are your perceptions of your development as a beginning teacher as a result of that support?

**Participant:** The teacher mentoring program has not helped in my teacher development thus far because of the lack of communication and support.

- 5. Interviewer:** What are your perceptions of the level of support that has influenced your instructional practices?

**Participant:** The level of support from the teacher mentoring program has not influenced my instructional practices in the classroom because my mentor is not on the same grade level with me. We do not teach the same subject matter. The administration should make sure that the mentor and mentee are on the same grade level and teach in the same subject area so that they could plan together and help each other out. This could enhance the teacher mentoring program.

- 6. Interviewer:** How does the mentoring program facilitate your professional development and growth?

**Participant:** The teacher mentoring program does not facilitate my professional development or growth due to the lack of opportunities to meet and discuss current challenges I am facing.

7. **Interviewer:** Identify specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that you feel has helped you as a teacher? Identify specific mentoring strategies used in the teacher mentoring program that you feel did not add to your growth as a teacher.

**Participant:** There are not any specific mentoring strategies that were used in the teacher mentoring program that I feel helped me as a teacher.

8. **Interviewer:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program?

**Participant:** The weaknesses of the teacher mentoring program are the lack of communication between the mentor and mentee, the minimal opportunities to meet as a group to discuss challenges we are currently facing, and the time of the meetings. The meetings are after school. This is a very inconvenient time for me. The only strength of the teacher mentoring program is having a mentor.

9. **Interviewer:** What are some things that the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom? What are some things that are done poorly in district's training of beginning teachers or that the district could improve upon?

**Participant:** Some of the things that the district does well in training beginning teachers and getting familiar with the classroom is a program called "Teacher

Pride”. This is a monthly meeting for new educators that allow them to share resources and strategies for dealing with issues that may arise in the classroom. They also have an opportunity to talk with veteran teachers from around the district. Some things that the district could improve on in the training of beginning teachers are the opportunities for new teachers to connect with veteran teachers in their building. I would benefit from more release time in which to develop networks among my colleagues. An observation schedule should be put in place with coverage for a substitute teacher.

**10. Interviewer:** What changes would you like to see in the Teacher Mentoring Program? How may the mentoring program impact beginning teachers in the future?

**Participant:** The changes I would like to see in the teacher mentoring program is more communication between mentor and mentee, pairing up beginning teachers with mentors in the same subject area could enhance the mentoring program, a more experienced mentor teacher to guide and support beginning teachers, more opportunities to shadow mentor teachers, and the time of the support meetings moved to during the instructional day. The teacher mentoring program may impact beginning teachers negatively because there is a disconnect between the district’s expectations and the school.

#### Follow-up Questions

**11. Interviewer:** What specifically did you learn from your mentor that helped your teaching practice?

**Participant:** I did not learn anything from my mentor that helped my teaching practice.

**12. Interviewer:** Describe what you wish you could have learned from your mentor that you did not learn.

**Participant:** I wish I could have learned how to manage my classes effectively.

**13. Interviewer:** What do you perceive would be different if you did not have a mentor?

**Participant:** I really did not have a mentor. I was just assigned a mentor.

**14. Interviewer:** Describe whether you were able to have open and candid conversations with your mentor and why (or why not).

**Participant:** I did not have open and candid conversations with my mentor because we did not communicate enough for me to get close to her.

**15. Interviewer:** How often do you and your mentor meet?

**Participant:** We only met twice at the beginning of the school year.

## Appendix D: Project

### “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” Workshop

#### Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives

##### **Program Goals**

- A. Educate beginning teachers on mentoring and give them an opportunity to practice being a mentee.
- B. Provide beginning teachers with the necessary mentoring skills to understand the concept of mentoring and the roles of mentors and mentees.
- C. Provide beginning teachers with the opportunity to collaborate with peers while developing a lesson plan that can be incorporated within their classroom and content area.
- D. Provide mentoring support to beginning teachers.
- E. Provide beginning teachers with mentoring skills to expand their knowledge base.

##### **Program Outcomes**

- A. Beginning teachers will understand the benefits of a mentoring program.
- B. Beginning teachers will work with peers and develop a lesson plan.
- C. Beginning teachers will spend time with mentors and develop a Professional Growth Plan (PGP).
- D. Beginning teachers will learn the roles of mentors and mentees.



- E. Beginning teachers will take advantage of the mentoring opportunities available.

### **Program Objectives**

- A. As a result of the introduction to the ‘mentoring’ concept, teachers will be able to identify the benefits of a mentoring program and what makes a mentoring relationship successful or not successful.
- B. As a result of mentor modeling, beginning teachers will be able to become develop and grow in their career.
- C. As a result of the time spent with peers, beginning teachers will leave the workshop with a Professional Growth Plan (PGP) and a sample lesson that can be implemented in their classrooms.
- D. As a result of the professional development workshop, beginning teachers will understand their roles as mentees while learning from their mentors.
- E. As a result of the professional development workshop, beginning teachers will be able to take full advantage of the range of mentoring opportunities available to them.

### **Sources for Participants**

Websites: Retrieved from <http://www.mc3edsupport.org>

Teachers Helping Teachers (This website provides resources for teachers by teachers.)

Survival Guide for New Teachers (This U.S. Department of Education publication discusses how new teachers can work effectively with veteran teachers, parents, principals, and teacher educators.)

Beginning Teachers Tool Box (The Beginning Teachers Tool Box is a community of educators with the mission of empowering new teachers for classroom success.)

**Target Audience**

Beginning teachers

**Workshop Outline**

This will be a 3-day workshop on the school campus one week prior to the start of school. Beginning teachers can expect time to discuss mentoring and create a plan for implementation of the information and material received; resources for their classrooms and school year; and interaction with mentors and other beginning teachers. Mentor teachers will be invited based on interest shown in supporting beginning teachers. They will participate in various roles ranging from facilitation of small groups to large group presentations. Each day of the workshop will be presented in three phases:

- An introductory icebreaker activity which seeks to build group rapport and provide an overview of the objectives and sequence of activities in the workshop
- A developmental phase which teachers particular concepts about the workshop topics: mentoring, benefits of the mentoring program, roles of mentors and

mentees, mentoring relationships, instructional strategies, and classroom management skills

- A concluding activity which provides an opportunity for participants to apply what they have learned in the workshop to their own personal and professional growth

Beginning teachers will have a variety of foci to prepare them with mentoring skills and strategies for starting their school year. Through large and small group work, the following content will be covered:

- Instructional strategies- Strategies to develop effective lessons, connect with students in the classroom, and learning students' specific interests and needs
- Classroom management- Overall tools that will align with school's plans/expectations
- Mentoring skills- Skills to ensure beginning teachers are benefiting from the mentoring program
- Professional Communication- Communication will include dealing with challenging issues with students, parents, and colleagues
- Breakout sessions- Sessions will include mentors sharing with beginning teachers: instructional materials, best practices, and relevant information. They will

cultivate professional dialogue and gather data to ensure that beginning teachers are receiving appropriate support.

**Format**

A variety of approaches will make the workshop more interesting. They will include:

- Informal question and answer sessions
- Brainstorming
- Case study
- Simulation exercises
- Demonstration exercises
- Lecture presentations

**Timetable:**

The 3-day workshop should take place early in August. The planning should begin by the end of the school spring semester in order to establish more concrete information for the administration as well as to ensure facilities for the workshop. Administrator needs to know about this workshop early enough to speak about it with mentoring teachers and beginning teachers in the spring and summer.

**Materials and Equipment:**

- An agenda
- Name tags
- Audio-visual equipment
- Resources
- Pencils and note pads

#### “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” Workshop Schedule

“Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” is a 3-day workshop designed specifically to help beginning teachers gain awareness about their new roles in mentoring, important mentoring skills, and how to identify goals to work on with mentors. The workshop is intended to supplement and enrich the school’s support of its beginning teachers. Mentors will support beginning teachers by offering support, assistance, and resources. The beginning teachers will be provided with a timely opportunity to learn from others and develop their skills.

## Day 1: Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring

Time	Activity
8:00-8:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening remarks- Welcoming beginning teachers.</li> <li>• An introductory “icebreaker” activity- To build group rapport and provide an overview of the objectives and sequence of activities in the workshop.</li> <li>• Discuss purpose- To help beginning teachers gain awareness about their new roles in mentoring, important mentoring skills, and how to identify goals to work on with mentors.</li> <li>• Discuss the key concepts of adult learning theory. To be effective teachers, beginning teachers will need to understand a few basics of adult learning theory and how they can use it to positively impact their role as teachers. Teachers will participate in team activities, role- plays, and group exercises to cover the major topics of adult learning theory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Learners need to know what is expected.</li> <li>✓ Adults learn best when they are invested in the learning process.</li> <li>✓ Teaching is only effective if it is given at the appropriate level.</li> <li>✓ Learners need to understand the relevance of what is being taught.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Discuss the key concepts of the experiential learning theory. Teachers will participate in role-plays, simulations, small team activities, and games to cover the four learning modes of experiential learning theory: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ concrete experience (feeling the experience of the activity)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ reflective observation (watching what the issue or situation is generating)</li> <li>➤ abstract conceptualization (thinking about the issues)</li> <li>➤ active experimentation (doing something about the issue or situation)</li> </ul>
8:45-10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitator will discuss the history of the “Mentor” concept and the benefits of a mentoring program.</li> <li>• Discussion of mentoring research and mentoring experiences.</li> <li>• Beginning teachers will be divided into small groups. They will be asked to play various roles: new teacher, mentor, veteran teacher, principal, mentor coordinator, and observer. They will be encouraged to “give voice” to the perspective of each involved and share what each might be feeling, thinking, and so forth. The “observer” will be asked to make note of how this dynamic might be impacting others: colleagues, other new teachers, students, and so forth.</li> </ul>
10:00-10:15	Restroom Break
10:15-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of what makes a mentoring relationship successful and not successful. Beginning teachers will work in groups to come up with a list. One person from each group will write on poster what the group came up with. Discuss responses and point out similarities and differences among groups.</li> </ul>
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own.
12:30-1:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion of the types of mentors, the roles of mentors and mentees, and mentoring relationships. Beginning teachers will learn how to acquire and/or get the most from mentors.</li> <li>• Beginning teachers and mentors will role-play to demonstrate understanding of the different types of mentors, roles of</li> </ul>

	mentors and mentees, and mentoring relationships.
1:30-2:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion of realistic expectations from a mentoring relationship.</li></ul>
2:30-2:45	Restroom Break
2:45-4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion of practicing being a mentee. Beginning teachers will discuss themselves, their motivations for growth, their expectations and needs, and how they can get the most from their mentoring relationship. They will role-play being mentees. Mentors will create a profile of the qualities of a good mentee based on their previous experiences, both positive and negative.</li></ul>



## Day 2: Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring

Time	Activity
8:00-8:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recap of Day 1.</li> <li>An introductory “icebreaker” activity which will seek to build group rapport and provide an overview of the objectives and sequence of activities in the workshop.</li> </ul>
8:45-10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentors will demonstrate professional guidance and support to beginning teachers through simulations. Beginning teachers will be introduced to two mentoring strategies (observations and conferencing).</li> <li>Beginning teachers will learn how to receive constructive feedback. Discuss with your group how you think you should receive constructive feedback. Select one person from your group to write on the poster a summary of your group responses.</li> </ul>
10:00-10:15	Restroom Break
10:15-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion of mentoring program planning and mentoring.</li> <li>Beginning teachers and mentors will work in groups to discuss “Planning and Mentoring Activities”. This will include goal setting as well as monitoring activities.</li> </ul>
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own.
12:30-1:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breakout Session- Beginning teachers will spend time with mentors. Mentors will share instructional materials, best practices, and relevant information.</li> </ul>
1:30-2:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentors will offer support by ensuring that beginning teachers’ questions and concerns are being addressed.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning teachers will spend time with a mentor to become familiar with developing and implementing professional growth plans. The mentors will provide instructional support through observations, feedback, and mentor/mentee team participation throughout the workshop.</li> <li>• Mentors will help beginning teachers develop professional growth plans. Mentors will also demonstrate how to implement on-going professional growth plans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Professional Growth Plan (PGP)</li> <li>➤ What criterion will you select for area of growth and development?</li> <li>➤ How will you accomplish the selected area of growth?</li> <li>➤ What will you collect, analyze, and share as evidence of how your new learning will positively impact student learning?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2:30-2:45	Restroom Break
2:45-4:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning teachers will break up into content groups and decide on a team leader, and then groups will develop a lesson plan. Mentors will give feedback to each group.</li> <li>• A concluding activity will provide an opportunity for beginning teachers to apply what they have learned in the workshop to their own personal and professional growth.</li> </ul>

## Day 3: Support of Beginning Teachers Through Mentoring

Time	Activity
8:00-8:45	Recap of Day 1 and Day 2.
8:45-10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An “icebreaker” activity to determine if beginning teachers know how to be a mentee.</li> <li>Beginning teachers will be given an opportunity to teach a mini-lesson. Mentors will observe and provide feedback (mentoring strategy). Beginning teachers will have conferences (to address questions and concerns) with mentors during breakout session.</li> <li>Discussion of “mentoring” support and mentoring skills. Beginning teachers will engage in role playing to learn mentoring skills. Case study: The beginning teachers will be presented with real-life scenarios involving mentoring issues that beginning teachers might face. Each problem will be presented to them in a real-life simulation. Once the challenge has been laid out for them, each group of beginning teachers must collaborate and share ideas and information that might help them deal with the particular situation. Once the groups have worked together and shared ideas to their satisfaction, they must then face the scenario and deal with the challenge as effectively as they can. When each group has completed the scenario, the group comes back together for a group discussion about what worked and what did not work. The beginning teachers then evaluate themselves on how they handled the situations.</li> </ul>
10:00-10:15	Restroom Break
10:15-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice session- teachers will put into practice the key</li> </ul>

	<p>concepts they just learned about. By role-playing, teachers will have the opportunity to practice putting the adult learning theory to work. Teachers will have the opportunity to practice skills and receive feedback.</p>
11:30-12:30	Lunch on your own.
12:30-1:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakout Session- Mentors will support beginning teachers by assisting in refining their teaching skills in addition to orienting them to the school district's goals, curriculum, culture, and policies.</li> </ul>
1:30-2:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning teachers will work in groups to discuss "Managing a Class". Topics will include: forming relationship with students, balanced strategies for motivating students to learn, teaching routines that save time and focus attention, establishing rules for a classroom learning community, and dealing with inattention and misbehavior.</li> <li>• Beginning teachers will engage in role playing to learn techniques for professional communication and effectively managing their time. Case study: The beginning teachers will be presented with real-life scenarios involving challenges that beginning teachers might face. Each problem will be presented to them in a real-life simulation. Once the challenge has been laid out for them, each group of beginning teachers must collaborate and share ideas and information that might help them deal with the particular situation. Once the groups have worked together and shared ideas to their satisfaction, they must then face the scenario and deal with the challenge as effectively as they can. When each group has completed the scenario, the group comes back together for a group discussion about what methods worked and what methods did</li> </ul>

	not work. The beginning teachers then evaluate themselves on how they handled the situations.
2:30-2:45	Restroom Break
2:45-4:00	<p>A concluding activity which will provide an opportunity for participants to apply what they have learned in the workshop.</p> <p>Question/Answer Session</p> <p>Formative feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain purpose of the feedback form</li> <li>• Distribute form</li> <li>• Allow time for beginning teachers to complete form</li> </ul>

### Appendix E: Professional Development Workshop Evaluation Form

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the “Support of Beginning Teachers through Mentoring” workshop. This evaluation seeks to determine whether the presentation increased your knowledge of the concept ‘mentoring’, clearly stated the goals of the workshop, and invoked a desire to participate in a professional development workshop. The information collected will be used to make changes to the workshop and create a timeline for mentoring activities.

*Directions:* Please circle the number that represents how you feel about the workshop.

1. Before the workshop, I was knowledgeable about the concept of mentoring.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. Before the workshop, I was knowledgeable about the role of a mentee.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. After the workshop, I am knowledgeable about the concept of mentoring.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. After the workshop, I am knowledgeable about the role of a mentee.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. The workshop approach was appropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. The presenter was knowledgeable.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. The sessions were valuable and informative.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I will implement what I have learned in my classroom this school year.

1	2	3	4	5
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Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
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*Directions:* Use the space provided to respond to the open-ended questions.

9. How effective has the workshop been in identifying and supporting you and your concerns?

10. Has the workshop been of benefit to you? If so, how? If not, what needs to change?

11. What new insights do you have regarding being a mentee after participating in the professional development workshop?

Suggestions or comments that you would like to add.

## Curriculum Vitae

Irish McCollum

**Education**

Walden University, Minneapolis, MN

EdD (candidate)

Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI

EdS

Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

MA

University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA

BS

**Professional****██████ County School District/██████ Middle School**

2004-Present

-ESOL Language Arts Teacher

-ESOL Department Chair

-ESOL Lead Teacher

-After School Coordinator of ELL Program

-Leadership Team Member

-6<sup>th</sup> Grade Gifted Language Arts Teacher-6<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts Department Chair

-Safety Patrol Sponsor



- Beta Club Sponsor
- Reading Specialist
- Teacher Support Specialist
- School Improvement Plan Committee Member
- Supervising Teacher
- Parent Outreach Instructor for ESOL

**████████ County School District/████████ Elementary**

1982-2004

- 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, & 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts and Math Teacher
- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Teacher
- 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, & 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Chairperson
- Math Specialist
- Teacher Support Specialist
- School Liason
- School Activity Coordinator
- Steering Committee Member for SACS Reports
- Workshop Presenter
- Staff Development Instructor
- Interim School Counselor
- After School Tutorial Coordinator
- Pay for Performance Coordinator
- Teacher of the Year 1995

-Numeracy Team Trainer

**Certification**

Georgia State Education Certified

1982-Present

-Middle Grade Education

-Middle Grades Language Arts

-Middle Grades Social Studies

-Gifted In-field

-ESOL endorsement

-Teacher Support Specialist